

Iran Task Force Holds Briefing on Iran Negotiations

LIST OF SPEAKERS

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TAKEYH:

Thanks for -- thanks for coming today. Good afternoon. My name is Ray Takeyh, and I want to welcome you to the first meeting of the Iran Task Force.

It's hard to welcome you to an inaugural meeting of a group that has been around for a year now, but this group came together in about a year ago and its mission at that time was primarily to advise Congress on an entire range of issues on nuclear matters, economic sanctions, and essentially parameters of a good deal and how to get a good deal.

During the period of intervening year, we have produced 10 memos, the copies are back there. It is a distinguished group of individuals who are members of the task force. The task force is co-directed by me and Mark Dubowitz. The best way of introducing Mark Dubowitz is to have a boxing analogy. Muhammad Ali once said about Joe Frasier, "If God ever called me to holy war, I want Joe Frasier there with me."

If God ever calls you to holy war, you want Mark Dubowitz there with you. Other members of the task force here are Olliand of course John, and I'll introduce John in a second who's essentially a member of the task force and will preside over today's meeting with the task force co-chairs to be distinguished from task force co-directors, and the distinction is, they're much more distinguished. So I'll turn it over to John now for conducting the rest of this conversation. Thank you.

HANNAH:

Can you hear me? Are we on? OK. Thanks Ray, and thanks to everybody for coming. Great turnout is testament not only to the importance of the subject matter but I think to the obviously the stellar panel that we've assembled today.

If a final deal is reached with Iran over the next month, it almost certainly will constitute the single most consequential national security agreement that the United States has concluded since the end of the Cold War. Not only implicates the vital interests of the United States, it touches issues that many of our closest allies in the Middle East view as nothing less than existential, literally questions life and death for the security and well-being of their nations.

Of course, one of the more notable features of our policy with respect to the Iranian nuclear issue has been absolutely critical, indeed I'd say leading role that the U.S. Congress has played over the last 10 years in the development of that policy. Absent the kind of bipartisan majorities in both chambers that pushed relentlessly year after year on the need for increased economic pressure to get Iran to negotiate seriously, I doubt we would have ever established the extraordinarily effective sanctions regime that we now have.

And without that regime, of course, the possibility of achieving any kind of satisfactory diplomatic resolution to this problem would almost certainly have been close to zero. As someone who worked in a former administration, that did at times actively resist the Congress' push against Iran, I think there's no doubt in retrospect that Congress more often than not, got this issue more right than a lot of people in the executive branch, and consistently so.

It better understood the urgency of the issue, it better understood what it would take in terms of U.S. leverage to make serious diplomacy possible and it was also frankly consistently a better judge than a lot of other people of what the international traffic would bear in terms -- particularly of the reactions of our partners in the P5+1 to any kind of determined U.S. effort to escalate crippling economic pressure against Iran.

So with that important history in mind, I hope today that in addition to the discussion of the emerging deal itself, we'll also be able to talk about the role of Congress in the crucial days, weeks, and months ahead. Another important feature of the Iranian nuclear issue is, of course, the role of intelligence, our ability to figure out what's happening in the Iranian program has always been vital.

But under this emerging deal with Iran, it looks as if it will become even more so. That's because an agreement that a lot of us once hoped would have at its heart the dismantlement of much if not all of Iran's critical nuclear infrastructure, has now evolved into an agreement that looks like it will be more about monitoring that infrastructure. And that's going to impose a very big burden on the U.S. intelligence community for years to come to act as the early warning system that will be able to detect Iranian violations with high confidence, and in a way that provides decision makers with ample time to mount an effective response.

Let me go ahead, introduce our distinguished panel briefly, most of everybody here, I think, knows them well, and as Ray said, we're very honored to call all of them co-chairs of the Iran Task Force. Senator Evan Bayh from Indiana served two terms in the U.S. Senate, following two terms as Indiana's governor. In the Senate, Senator Bayh sat on several key committees concerned with the Iranian nuclear issue including the Banking, Armed Services, and Intelligence Committees. Welcome senator. It's great to have you.

Senator Joseph Lieberman from -- excuse -- Senator Joseph Lieberman from Connecticut served in the U.S. Senate for 24 years, including as a longtime pivotal member of the Armed Services Committee

and as the chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. No exaggeration to say that Senator Lieberman was a truly pivotal voice in virtually all the major National Security and Foreign Policy Debates that the United States engaged in since the end of the Cold War, including the Iranian nuclear program, so it's an honor and privilege to welcome Senator Lieberman.

Finally, we also are pleased to be joined by retired Air Force four star General Mike Hayden. At the pinnacle of his long and distinguished career, General Hayden served first as the head of the National Security Agency for almost 10 years, and then as director of the CIA for nearly three years after that. He was a major player at the highest levels of the U.S. government and all of the historic events and policies that took place in that difficult decade that followed 9/11. I was lucky enough to have a front row seat at, on occasion to watch him at work in those days. He's really an amazing professional, great public servant, so thank you for being here General Hayden.

The way it will work is that I'm going to pose some questions to the panel and hopes of getting a number of good issues and insights on the table, that will go for about the next 35 to 40 minutes, and then we'll open it up to the floor for perhaps another 30 minutes or so for questions from the audience. So, let me dive right in by simply asking all of you for some initial thoughts about the emerging Iran deal. At least what we know of it coming out of -- out of Lausanne framework that was announced in the beginning of April.

Assuming the deal does get done, and I'd be interested to hear your thoughts and how likely you think that is, but assuming it gets done, what's your assessment, good deal, bad deal, too soon to tell? Senator Lieberman?

LIEBERMAN:

Thanks John. Great to be part of this FDD Task Force and honored to be co-chair with General Hayden and Evan Bayh, Senator Bayh.

Everything that I have heard about what's happened in the negotiations tells me that this will be a bad deal for the United States of America and for our allies. If it comes out otherwise, I'll be pleasantly surprised, but I think the odds of that happening are remote. And just to state it succinctly, and you touched on this John in your opening comments, and what I'd thought begin as an attempt -- I'm not against negotiations, you know, one negotiates with one's enemies often to try to reconcile differences.

But what started out I thought as a negotiation that intended to remove step-by-step the very difficult economic sanctions on Iran, in return for Iran essentially terminating its nuclear weapons development program, has now become something quite different. Notwithstanding the fact that we went into the negotiations with the advantage that the Iranians were suffering from these sanctions, these economic sanctions and what we seem to be talking about now is a serial suspension of most of the economic sanctions in return for -- not the elimination or end of the Iranian Nuclear Weapons Program, but a kind of dialing down temporarily with some hopefully monitoring, how extensive it will be, I don't know.

And on every level, this is a disaster. I mean, we are dealing with an autocratic repressive regime that openly states its antipathy for the United States, for Israel, and not so openly expresses its antipathy for most of our closest allies in the Arab World, and they know it. As a result of the agreement, they're going to end up having an enormous flow of capital come back into them with which, I mean, what's startling to me, I'm going to control myself because I want to give my two co-chairs some time to speak.

But these negotiations have been going on as if they were in a bubble, and there was no -- the negotiators have no awareness of what was happening outside. The Iranians continue to kill and jail

their political opponents; they're tremendously repressive of dissent and of their people. They're still -- they put this Washington Post reporter on trial, and they have gone through -- we used to talk about the Islamic Republic of Iran as an expansionist hegemonic power, it has expanded during the time of these negotiations throughout the region to the great detriment of our values, of our allies, and of ourselves.

So, I'm very pessimistic about this, and I think there's really at this point two things that can save us from a very bad consequential agreement. John, I want to pick out something you said, because I think it's really important. This is -- this is in my opinion the most serious consequential international agreement that the United States has entered since the end of the Cold War. It has that much of an impact on us.

And there are only two things that at this point that I think can save us from this terrible agreement. One is the intransigence of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who indeed may not allow robust inspections, and I don't know how we can accept an agreement without that.

And second is the Congress of the United States. Thanks to the bipartisan legislation of Bob Corker, Bob Menendez, Ben Cardin, and others, introduced and enacted. I'm going to stop there. I'm happy to come back to talk about Congress' role, but Congress' role is unique and critically important in the days ahead.

HANNAH:

Thank you. Senator Bayh?

BAYH:

Well John -- I have to -- John. Thank you John. And let me echo my friend and colleague Joe Lieberman's remarks about it's a pleasure to serve with General Hayden and Senator Lieberman.

So I think we're likely -- I think it's highly likely we'll get a deal, unless the Iranians are just completely intransigent. I think it's likely that in the Senate, you would get 60 votes, I think that a significant level of skepticism about the efficacy the deal will be in order. It will be very difficult to verify their compliance. It would be very difficult to have sanctions quote, "snap back," close quote into place following loosening. I think you'll even get interpretive differences, John.

We saw some of this after the announcement of the preliminary agreement where immediately both sides took differing interpretations about what words actually meant. And so, it's difficult to verify and enforce a deal where there may just be -- they may have sort of superficially papered over fundamental disagreements, but then immediately retreat to their respective positions shortly thereafter. And so, I think it will come to a vote in the Senate. My own guess is that there would be six -- as all of you are aware, the Senate has to act affirmatively, and so there may be a filibuster against that.

My guess is there would be 60 votes to break a filibuster. To get to 67 to actually overwrite a presidential veto, that would be a very difficult matter, particularly when you get up to 65, 66, 67 votes. But regardless, you can have an agreement going into effect where two-thirds of the American Congress about, roughly, a little less than two-thirds, a clear majority would have expressed -- would have -- would have expressed significant reservations about the agreement.

And that's a very difficult position from which to be operating internationally, particularly with another presidential election coming up, the Iranians are going to wonder, "well, what does this mean,

do we go forward now and try to push the envelope in the agreement, or do we hold back and wait and see who the next president is going to be?" Our allies in the region -- we will have a real risk of this touching off nuclear proliferation surely in Saudi Arabia, possibly in Egypt and Turkey. So that could be an intended consequence of this that is, would be really destabilizing.

And the other thing that it's difficult to disaggregate here as hard as we might try, is the other behavior that Iran is engaged in outside of the context of their nuclear program. As we're all aware, they do fund Hezbollah, they are deeply involved in the civil war in Syria, deeply involved in destabilizing in Yemen, and to the extent that we, you know, they're clearly going to be pushing for as much immediate sanctions relief as they can get, that's a fancy way of saying, as much money as they can get their hands on.

Money is fungible, and you can bet that some of that will find its way into things that -- to supporting activities that would not be in the national security interests of the United States. So you have to balance that off against any potential good the agreement might accomplish, so that's a worrisome fact. Their ongoing ballistic missile program, those missiles can only be designed to hit either Western Europe or the Continental United States, eventually. I think we need to be fairly clear eyed about what's going on with that.

So, the final thing I would say is when you kind of drill down through all of this, we have to have a national debate about what is the essential nature of the Iranian regime? Are they a normal nation state essentially that -- I mean, we had difficult relations with the former Soviet Union during the Communist period, but they weren't suicidal, they weren't a radical theocracy, and we could deal with them, but there's something about the Iranian nature, short of committing national suicide that will continue to have them be an aggressive regional power working actively against the national security interest of the United States, undermining our allies, and quite possibly not living up to the agreement that they've signed and eventually getting a nuclear capability, surely after 10 years under the agreement, possibly sooner if they're willing to cheat, and is that something as a country that we think is consistent with our national security interest?

My own view is that that would not be consistent with our national security interests, but I think therein lies -- answering that question, what is the essential nature of their regime, how are they likely to move forward, and I think there's just an abundance of evidence suggesting that what they're trying to do here is get what they want and pay as small a price for it as they possibly can, and at the end of the day, that's not good for us or for our allies.

HANNAH:
General Hayden?

HAYDEN:
Well, I get to say -- I'd like to associate myself with the remarks of the distinguished senators from Connecticut and Indiana, and I really mean that. Let me take a little more narrow view, a little -- I totally agree with Senator Bayh's characterization, I'd summarize, he and I were chatting about it over our sandwiches, that we're kind of focused now by the national debate, that the problem is Iran with nuclear weapons.

And I actually suggest to you that the problem is Iran. And the nuclear weapons question is an important, but a subset of the broader question of Iran. And we need to be very careful that an apparent resolution of the nuclear question is then, allows us to mislead ourselves that we have suddenly solved the Iran question, which I think lingers for a very, very long time.

I also need to mention that, you know, in the executive branch in the last administration, we left this as an ugly baby for the new guys. This was not a problem that we said, "Aww, man, if you'd only just did what we laid out here, this would have been finished the your first term," we didn't have any such plans. So I fully recognize how very, very difficult this is. All that said, to answer John's first question, I do think we're trending towards a deal. I think the dynamics of the negotiation as many of us feared, have created its own energy in the direction of a deal. The dynamics being so strong, I think, that we've gone from -- if we were ever at "no deal is better than a bad deal," I actually think the circumstances under which we'd now operate, because of the energy and investment that's been put in this is, "any deal is better than no deal."

And I fear that's what we'll get. Senator Bayh mentioned interpretive differences. And I really would call your attention to that as we go forward. We cannot allow either government to paper over what remain are significant differences in terms of what has been agreed. I got asked after the four page white paper that we put out to -- what did I think about what the white paper contained, and frankly after only a day or two in watching the responses from Tehran, I'd had to say that I don't know that we've agreed to anything, and one needs to be really, really careful about this, particularly in the most narrow lane I'll talk about, which is the intelligence lane which is the verification lane.

We have really got to hammer unarguable verification procedures into any agreement, because I'm here to tell you that unilateral American intelligence will be insufficient to build up enough confidence, in my view, that an agreement is being honored. In other words, American intelligence good, in other words American intelligence is going to tell you a lot, but to get the level of confidence you will need to legitimate action, will require an invasive inspection regime that must be negotiated before we agree to any such treaty or arrangement.

Let me stop there. John, I know there are a lot of other questions, but we'll get to them.

HANNAH:

General, I might -- I -- let me just follow-up quickly on -- with you on this question, the nature and scope of the inspection regime, and particularly relating to military sites and the ability to access and talk to Iranian scientists, if not Iranian decision makers who are involved in the nuclear program.

When you put on your CIA director's hat, I wonder if you could sketch out for us just -- do you actually need what everybody has called "anytime anywhere snap inspections," that include military and Quds Force sites, what kind of interviews, how far would you want to go into Iranian nuclear weapons bureaucracy to get answers to your questions? And what would you -- I mean because it seems to me the president is asking our intelligence community, via the IAEA, I suppose, to have an ability to almost instantaneously detect Iranian violations. So, I wonder if you could just explain it a little bit.

HAYDEN:

Sure. Yes, John. I do think anytime, anywhere inspections are absolutely essential. I was President Obama's CIA chief for about three weeks while we were waiting for Leon Panetta to get confirmed, and I actually attended the first NSC meeting that he had on Iran.

And the president turned to me and said, "General, how much LEU and HEU do they have, or MEU medium enriched?" And I actually said to the president, "Mr. President, I actually know the answer to those questions." But for a moment, let me give you a different way of thinking about this issue. And what I said to the president was, "Sir, I don't think -- I don't think anybody in my community thinks that there's an electron, or a neutron in Natanz is ever going to end up in the nuclear weapon. What

they're building up in Natanz and other like facilities, are confidence and technology, and to go ahead and move to HEU requires them to cheat so badly that it will be detected or to kick the inspectors out."

And therefore, what we believe would happen in a breakout, is that they would simply take the technology from Natanz and replicate it at a secret military facility, and it's there in that facility that the HEU for a weapon would be enriched. Now at the time, I told the president we knew A, secret nuclear facility. We knew that Qom was under construction, they didn't know that we knew, right? And that's the scenario that we always pictured, John.

And so, how do you -- and so I'm an American intelligence officer, right? And I'm going to go into the president with some really bad news, all right? We actually have a name for this, we called this the dynamic of the unpleasant fact, OK? So, you know, when Jim Clapper or whoever's in Jim's position now gets to walk in and says, "Mr. President, do you recall that war you promised to start in the Persian Gulf? Well guess what, today is the day." OK? What is the burden of proof on the American intelligence community?

Number one, to come to that judgment. Number two, to get the American political leadership to accept that judgment, and number three then to sell that judgment in one way or another to a broader -- to a broader international community without giving up critical sources and methods. This is really hard, John. And so, the presence of inspectors, the ability to go anywhere, at any time, I think -- I think is absolutely essential.

HANNAH:

Even with all that is that -- I mean how do you think about this one year breakout time that the administration has put so much focus on, not only A, the ability to detect, but as you say, the ability then to mobilize an effective and quick response within the scope of a year, perhaps getting the rest of the international community to come along to something that could include in military attack. How -- just -- from based on your experience, how...

HAYDEN:

Yeah. Olli and Ray have written about this. We tried to -- we tried to show how you can use up a year. Pretty easily actually. First of all, you know, it -- the clock doesn't -- OK, the clock doesn't start when you detect it -- the one year clock starts when they begin to violate the agreement. So there's a gap between the violation and the detection, and then all of that dynamic I suggest to you has to take place before you get to a meaningful political decision, then happens after you have detected it and built up enough personal confidence that you want to take to the president the worst news he's going to hear in his entire administration.

And so it's -- number one, I think our estimate that we've got them more than a year has gotten awful lot of Kentucky windage in the -- in the estimate. And even if it was even if it was provable, it may prove insufficient.

HANNAH:

OK, senator, is it a technical term Kentucky windage?

HAYDEN:

Yeah, I've been very fond of senators from Kentucky for the last 24...

LIEBERMAN:

I think -- I think Senator Paul will define that for you.

HANNAH:

Senator Bayh, one of the other big issues outstanding in the talks appears to be this issue of the pace and scope of sanctions relief that Iran is going to get under this deal, and there's also a related question of how quickly you could revive these sanctions, the kind of term of art that everybody's latched on to now is "Snap Back" sanctions. You and Senator Lieberman were heavily involved and watched how long it took to actually get in place this -- the kind of effective sanction architecture that we have now. So, in looking at this, how realistic do you find this idea of snap back?

BAYH:

Well, John as I indicated in my opening remarks, I think, you know, it would be very difficult to achieve a snap back once you've significantly reduced the sanctions regime.

As you pointed out it took a lot of time and effort to put into effect. We made them progressive more stringent, and they have exacted a real toll in the Iranian economy, we backed off some, but the sanctions were in significant degree responsible for slower economic growth, a devaluation of the Iranian currency, very high level of inflation within Iran, and the regime has been very concerned about that. Once we back off of that, you know, clearly what they're going to want is as much relief as soon as they can get it.

And so, we'll have to negotiate all over all that, but once you back off, once the Europeans, the Chinese, and others have begun to reenter the Iranian market, signed a variety of economic agreements, you know, money flowing back and forth. It is very, very hard, let alone the Russians, very, very difficult to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. And I would say, realistically, if you want to be, you know, practical about it, practically impossible to accomplish.

And so the real answer to your question is, if the decision about reimposing sanctions was going to be made solely in Washington D.C., that would be one thing. But without all of our allies, and even those who are aren't our allies would be important to any sort of meaningful sanctions regime coming along, it's just not going to happen and they're going to be highly reluctant to go back once they have really reestablished meaningful financial and economic relations, so it's just not practical, I think.

HANNAH:

Senator Lieberman, do you want to make a quick comment on that?

LIEBERMAN:

Yeah. I agree with everything Evan said. There's a danger in this next weeks of negotiation that the U.S. will agree to suspend a lot of the sanctions on Iran. And the reassurance that the administration will give us, is that they'll be prepared to snap them back. But it's not --as Evan said, it's not going to be so easy.

So really, in my opinion, we ought to be halting and demanding in our lifting of sanctions until we see that the Iranians are substantially complying with whatever promises they make as a final agreement, because our backstop that you're going to snap back after you suspend a lot of the sanctions early on before the Iranians have proved anything to us about their behavior, is really not much of a guarantee at all.

And so, if I can add here, I -- there's a natural sort of rhythm to Congressional focus as we and probably a lot of other people in the room can tell you. Congress did something extremely important and quite unique in adopting the Corker-Menendez-Cardin et cetera legislation.

In my time, I don't remember anything quite like it. One of the -- if I may digress for a moment, one of the wonderful opportunities I've had in the last couple of years since I've left the Senate is that I've taught a course at Columbia Law School in something -- in one of the few legal subjects I probably know something about, the role of Congress in American Foreign and Defense Policy. There's a wonderful quote from a political scientist, Edward Corwin, and I paraphrase, who said that, The Constitution invites the president and Congress to compete forever for the privilege of determining American foreign and defense policy.

In this case, first with the sanctions and then the -- with this extraordinary requirement that this agreement come to Congress for review and possible rejection, Congress has done something really significant, which is a measure of the broad bipartisan anxiety about the direction of these negotiations, and I think what members of Congress and both parties are hearing from their constituents, which also anxiety about what's happening in the negotiations with the Iranians.

So here, coming back to the rhythm of Congress, there's a natural way in which Congress will now step back and wait for the agreement to occur. I wish as a logical corollary or a follow-on of adopting the Corker legislation, that Congress can get together on a similarly bipartisan basis and essentially say to the administration, and the P5+1, and Iran, by a letter, by a joint resolution. Here are conditions that we consider minimal for us to accept and not reject an agreement that you reach. I don't know that that's going to happen, but I think that that would be important.

BAYH:

If I could add just two other quick points, John. The interpretive differences that I referenced and that General Hayden spoke about it -- it is very important that there be a meaningful period for verification. If we just allow the Iranians to get a significant amount of sanctions relief until we can assure ourselves that we actually have a quote unquote agreement. Not just the -- and that we -- and that both sides have a consensus on what the words on the document mean, it would be folly to grant relief. You'd be granting relief only to discover, possibly fairly quickly, that in fact you don't have a meeting of the minds.

So, you need some period to, a meaningful period to verify that A, you have an agreement, test the bonafides of the -- of the Iranians. That's the first point. The second point, refresh my memory, were the French being fairly hard nosed, was it about any time anywhere inspections or about the phasing in of sanctions?

LIEBERMAN:

Inspections.

BAYH:

Inspections. Well, you asked me about sanctions relief, so I won't -- I was just going to say it should be a matter of some concern to us if the French are being more hard nosed than we are in the course of the negotiations, that might be a sign of something is amiss.

HANNAH:

Senator Lieberman, I do want to come back quickly on Corker-Cardin in a second, but first I just want to probe you on this, kind of anomaly we face where the United States has led negotiation on this deal, two of our primary international rivals for power and influence, China and Russia, seem to like the deal and going to sign on, on the other hand, some of our best allies in the region seemed to hate this deal, and despite what President Obama said in the recent interview that no one will have more at stake in this nuclear deal than himself, I think some of our allies would -- might dispute that.

How do you -- how shall we think about that, that countries like Israel, the Saudi some of our allies in the Gulf really feel threatened by this deal, how do we weigh that in the -- in the balance of deciding whether or not this makes sense or not?

LIEBERMAN:

Well, we, the United States should weigh it heavily -- the reaction of our allies who are in Iran's neighborhood heavily as we consider going forward, because they're in the neighborhood, and they're the target of Iranian hatred, anger, we've all talked to them. We're talking about the Israelis and the Arabs, and they can't believe that we're negotiating as wholesomely as we are with the Iranians, because they say this regime since 1979 has given us no reason to trust them.

You have to have a very demanding agreement with really anytime, anywhere inspections that really ended the Iranian nuclear program for our best allies, Israel and the so called moderate Arabs to feel unthreatened by it, and so it has -- the fact that we've gone forward has really diminished our credibility with our allies in the region, and our influence with our allies in the region, and I think it will diminish our ability to keep the region peaceful.

My colleagues have talked about the fact that Saudis will definitely -- well, they've said it -- will definitely match every step that they know that the Iranians are taking to develop nuclear weapons. The Israelis still reserve the right to take military action, to disable the Iranian program, because they think it is that much of an existential threat, and beyond the immediate region. This is age of instant global communications, our allies in the rest of the world.

Begin with Asia, go to Eastern Europe, particularly, go to Africa, go to Latin America. They're watching this. And I -- part of what they're seeing, is that we have not involved or listened to our closest allies in the Middle East as we've gone ahead with these negotiations.

And that makes them anxious that we will pay as little attention to them if the -- the hegemonic power in their region begins to move on them. I know the U.S. may feel that we can sell more arms to our

allies in the Middle East. We can promise we'll put an umbrella over them, should the Iranians go nuclear.

But I'm afraid that as a result of the way we've conducted ourselves, including in these negotiations, they don't trust that promise of American guarantee of their security the way they used to.

HANNAH:

General Hayden, I wonder if I could just ask you on Israel and the question of the viability of an Israeli military strike to set back the Iranian nuclear program, either with a deal or without a deal, but just how viable as a technical matter do you think that is?

HAYDEN:

John, my consistent judgment has been it's not all that viable. Now, that's not to discount the IAF and the professionalism of the pilots and the excellence of its intelligence, but you know physics enter in here pretty quickly. It's far. It's a thousand miles.

The air force is small. The target base is dispersed. The targets are numerous. Many the targets are hardened and frankly, neither we nor the Israelis are sure we know where everything is. You know, if the Israelis get to do this, it's a raid. It's not a campaign.

They get to do it once. And because of the great distances involved, even some of the fighter aircraft, I suspect, rather than be carrying ordnance, would have to buddy refuel the weapons carriers in order to get in to the target area and have enough time to maneuver and safely to get home.

So my judgment is this is, this is a really hard do for them. I don't think there's anyone that I know in the IDF or Israeli intelligence who thinks this is a really great idea. They'll do what they're told, and they do it well.

But then the strategic question then becomes, John, would any Israeli government put the only strategic relationship on which the survival of the Israeli state depends at risk for a single raid that would probably set the program back, if successful, three to six months? And my sense is that the answer to that is no.

HANNAH:

Can I just ask our senators? There is a -- quite a bit of discussion now about the kinds of benefits in the aftermath of the deal that United States might provide some of our allies. Talking about Israel in particular, and some of the questions that General Hayden raised, there's been a little bit of talk.

I don't know how realistic it would be, that we ought to provide Israel with the kinds of capabilities, specifically something like the Massive Ordnance Penetrator, our biggest bunker buster, as well as a platform to deliver those, to establish kind of the credibility of that Israeli option to make sure the Iranians, at least, have got to worry about the Israelis in terms of violating any deal.

Can I just get your views on whether you'd be supportive of that kind of...

LIEBERMAN:

I would. I'm a little bit distant from what's being discussed on Capitol Hill, or between the Israeli government and the U.S. government. But, you know, there's great bipartisan support for Israeli security, great concern about the impact of a nuclear Iran on Israeli security, so it's possible that the discussion will get to that, and it does have a deterrent, should have a deterrent effect, on Iran.

Incidentally -- and no one in Israel is really talking actively about a military strike, but for it to happen it seems to me, the Israelis would to have intelligence that there was a breakout occurring. In other words, it couldn't -- I don't see how plausibly for the reasons General Hayden said that the Israelis could just say, "This is a bad deal. They're going to get nuclear weapons in 10 years. We got to stop them now."

I think there'd have to be evidence that there was a breakout, intelligence, a tough decision for any Israeli government at that point, do you share it with, as General Hayden said, our -- the Israelis foremost strategic ally and challenge the United States to take action, or do you take action yourself?

It's -- and, of course, the general is right about the relative capacity of the Israelis to do damage. I believe they could do some damage. They might have some surprising allies along the distance from Israel to Iran who would help them to refuel, et cetera.

But it's still a very difficult mission. And you know, the Iranians have been preparing for this for a long time. That is they've been acting defensively. They are -- unlike the Iraqi nuclear facility or the Syrian facility, this is really a dispersed operation.

And as somebody, a great man who I respect really, he used to work for the IAEA once said to me, "There's not been a time in the last 25 years where there hasn't been a part of the Iranian nuclear program that we haven't known about," and so you got to assume that that's probably true today.

HANNAH:

Yeah. Senator Bayh, one of the -- one of the big, I guess, criticisms that the administration throws back at the skeptics of this deal, is that while the deal is not perfect, it's good enough and it's better than any alternative that the opponents of this particular deal have put forward, that nothing that has been put forward as an alternative is in fact particularly realistic.

It tends to be very idealistic, I think the administration would say. I wonder what your view of that is. Was it ever true? Is it true now? And if there is an alternative out there, what do you think are the outlines of it?

BAYH:

Well, first, with regard to your last question, John, I would be for all for giving the state of Israel any weapons they need to defend themselves. With regard to launching a preemptive strike against Iranian nuclear facilities, I think we need to think about that, and the reason for that is not that I would be reluctant to have the Israelis have such weapon systems, is I think it may be a distinction without a difference, because if the Israelis attack the Iranian sites, there is no way the Iranians will believe that we weren't completely involved in such a thing.

And would probably react toward us the way they would react if we just did it ourselves. And so, I think we need just to think through the whole idea of preemption, and that whether you really, by sort of outsourcing it to the Israelis have gotten yourself anything. Not clear to me that you really -- that you really have.

And the other thing, the general knows far more about this than I do, but my understanding is that, you know, one off raid, to really do this right, it would take a longer period of time; you need to ensure your subject, if you're going to take all the down side of going through the course of action like that. And the downside would be significant. You need to, you know, try and maximize the chances that you would be effective. And in order to do that, you'd need to bring down the Iranian air defense capabilities. You'd need to be able to revisit the target from time to time.

I mean, it's a bigger undertaking that probably we and we alone are presently situated to do. So that's - - with regard to that. So I'm not sure really what you've bought yourself by doing what you've indicated. With regard to -- is a better deal -- well look, I think, you know, candidly you do encounter situations in life where they're just are not great alternatives, and this may be one of them.

I mean there are -- this is a difficult situation. If it weren't, it would have been solved a long time ago. And one of the reasons it's so difficult that it does deal with the essential nature of the Iranian regime.

And are they willing to essentially change themselves and their aspirations in some pretty significant ways? You have to be a little skeptical about that. And so, in terms of alternatives, John, I would say, you know, if I were still voting on these things, I think the status quo is better than a bad deal.

Now, I know the counter argument against that is that, well, the Iranians will just immediately try and break out and achieve a nuclear capability, you know, if they -- if they can't get some sanctions relief.

Well, if that's how they're going to behave, then you'll really know who you're dealing with. And if that's how you think that they're going to behave, well, then what does it suggest about their good faith in complying with any sort of agreement you strike with them?

So, you know, their economy has come back some. The sanctions have been relaxed some, but it's still not great there domestically right now. And so I think a legitimate alternative would be to just say, "Look, we've tried and tried, and to put it back on the Iranians, you just haven't been willing to come far enough in terms of meaningful inspections, in terms of a reasonable period where each side can verify the good faith of the other. And we just can't get there," and to kind of maintain the status quo and see how they behave. I think that is a perfectly legitimate alternative in a situation where there are no perfect or great ones.

HANNAH:

Senator Lieberman, I don't know if you want to comment on your idea of an alternative. One thing you suggested that could, in theory, happen, although I'd like your assessment of the likelihood that in fact Congress gets the 67 votes to disapprove this deal and override any presidential veto.

But what would be the consequences of that, do you think, the administration talks a lot about the Iranians, either racing ahead. This will be either an Iranian bomb or war, and the collapse of our position with our international friends who have signed up for this particular deal. Is any of that realistic?

LIEBERMAN:

Let me start with the -- my own prediction about what happens if -- assuming there's an agreement and assuming it's as bad as I believe it will be. It's still -- I believe Congress will reject the agreement, which as Evan said before, should not be minimized. It's quite a remarkable statement to the world that the president has negotiated an agreement which bipartisan majorities in Congress will reject, and then really it is his agreement.

Then the question is he vetoes it, presumably. Is it possible to get two-thirds in both houses? It's difficult. It really is. But I think it's doable. I think you need about a third of the Democrats to join most of the Republicans. I don't know that all the Republicans will vote to override a veto.

And I believe at that point there's going to be a massive mobilization of people who feel that we're at a turning point in history, that if it is -- if a bad deal goes forward, and the Iranians are on the road to nuclear weapons it compromises the security, first and foremost of us, our children, and grandchildren.

And as Evan said, the Iranian -- I'll just say it a little differently. They're working on these ballistic missiles, not because they want to -- the Iranians, not because they want to be in range of Israel or Saudi Arabia, they already are in range. They already have missiles in range of their regional antagonists, if I can put it that way.

These are missiles long range that are -- that have Europe and the U.S. in mind, and a potential kind of Cold War or Hot War situation. So, I think it's possible. I mean, bottom-line, hard to get two-thirds in both chambers, but possible if the deal is as bad as I think it's going to be. I forgot the second part of the question.

HANNAH:

No, no, that -- I think that does it.

LIEBERMAN:

Oh what happens then? Real short, tougher sanctions and I know we're going to lose some of our allies in this. But access to the U.S. banking system is still the -- well, I was about to say the gold standard, is a little -- mixing of metaphors there, it's what you got to have in world business.

So we -- if we stick with it and add to the sanctions, we still have the capacity, what? To hopefully bring them back to the table for a more reasonable negotiation.

BAYH:

If I could just add two things, John, the -- well, the second -- the first of which involves Congress, I do think this very intense debate we're having about fast track for potential trade agreements has required the administration to spend a significant amount of political capital.

Coming just a few months thereafter to have another very difficult heavy lift in Congress, where there is significant substantive skepticism and concern, would be even more difficult. And so, I think as I said, I think the 60 votes would be there, to get the 67, you know, that's, you know, that's hard, but I think you'd be within two or three votes of such a thing.

Maybe even a vote of such a thing, depending on how it all played out, so I do think that this trade debate that's taking place and the internal dynamics, particularly within the Democratic party over that do affect this to some extent.

The other thing I'd say is, I think the most effective argument made by the administration and their allies is something along the following lines. Look, who are we kidding here, the Chinese, and the Russians, and possibly some others are about to head south on the sanctions regime anyway, it's all

going to go away whether we want it to or not, because they're going to -- you know, they're just going to head for the hills on this thing.

So we may as well try and get whatever we can even though, you know, kind of we won't say it publicly, but even though we all know it's not really what any of us would like. And I think the counter argument to that is, you probably have -- and that's why I get back to the status quo.

The economy is not good in Iran on right now. My guess is, you had a better chance of convincing of those countries who are perhaps contemplating, taking themselves out of the sanctions regime, a better chance of getting them to remain in place for a -- some period of time, than you do at this moment of really hammering out an agreement that the majority of Congress would look at and say, "That's a good agreement. We can verify it." The sanctions, I think your chances of maintaining what we currently have are better than getting an acceptable agreement, is I think the better counter argument to that.

HANNAH:

All right. Thanks, I'm getting the notice that we need to move to the audience Q&A. I think we've got some microphones out there, so why don't we just go first to here in the second row.

Can you please state your name and the affiliation, and please state it as -- in the form of a question as best as you can?

QUESTION:

Yes. My name is Jim Rickards. I'm a portfolio manager of West Shore funds. I've have a question for General Hayden.

General, the effectiveness of the sanctions depended upon U.S. control of the dollar payment system, and by extension control with our allies of the SWIFT payment system. In addition to acquiring uranium, Iran along with Russia and China in the last five years, have acquired 6,000 tons of gold and are building out an alternative payment system.

So my question is, the panel has talked about how the Snap Back may be problematic, but even you did snap back, is it possible that it would be ineffective because Iran will have extricated itself from the dollar payment system before that happens? Thank you.

HAYDEN:

I'll comment on that, but not too much because it's a bit out of my lane in terms of how that it works, but at the geopolitical level, I think the point as a very serious one. Senator Lieberman mentioned about the banking system being the gold standard.

And we know that. And then frankly targeted sanctions and what we're able to do with regard to global finance, I would say it become the PGMs, the precision-guided munitions in the 21st century. That said, the more you use it, the more you motivate other people to build an alternative system. I don't know if the Chinese are doing that because of this. I think they're doing what it is they're doing because of their own economic self-interest.

But it does make our use of these kinds of tools more challenging in the future, because our control is less exhaustive. I don't know that it's in place quickly enough to do what you said for this problem, but

it's certainly something that's facing us, if not over this ridge line, over the second or third out there ahead of us.

HANNAH:

I just put in a quick plug for FDD's Center for Illicit Finance and Sanctions, which is actually looking at precisely this kind of threat in economic warfare. Right here, in the fourth row.

QUESTION:

Hi, Rachel Oswald (ph), CQ Roll Call. My question is a bit of hypothetical, and I apologize for that, but assuming that there is a nuclear deal that broadly follows the preliminary framework of April 2nd, and assuming that Congress is not able to overcome a veto of any resolution disapproval. What would the panel like to see happen in 2017 when there's a new U.S. president?

HANNAH:

Anybody want to?

LIEBERMAN:

You know, when I was in elected office, my staff told me never answer a hypothetical. But now that I'm out there, you know, born free again, so that's a really interesting question, assuming there is an agreement, it's rejected, president vetoes, veto is not overridden. What happens, well, the first question is, does the new president in 2017 continue to abide by the agreement?

And there's a real pressure on any administration not to break an agreement that a predecessor made, so there will be a pressure on that. A new president, whoever it is, might, I should say, whoever he or she is, might be tougher on the details and the implementation of the agreement.

The other thing that probably would happen up here on Capitol Hill is that there would be an -- there probably -- I hope there would be, first, a very aggressive oversight of the sanctions and the lifting of sanctions that has occurred after the agreement is implemented.

And there'd probably be, particularly with regard to Israel, an attempt to mandate that the administration, hopefully with the support of the administration, provide weapon systems to Israel with which they could defend themselves or in -- if the circumstance arose be more effective and an initiative against an Iranian breakout -- nuclear breakout, all hoping that that would be a deterrent.

But I'm really blue skying there, because I think we'd be in a very bad situation. The real -- guts (ph) move would for a new president to say this is a bad deal and find a way to get out of it. Not easy.

HANNAH:

Right here. Right here and then we'll go to the back. Go ahead.

QUESTION:

Thank you. My question is for Senator Lieberman.

HANNAH:

Please identify yourself, go ahead.

QUESTION:

Oh, yes. Connor Wolf (ph) with The Daily Caller News Foundation. Lindsey Graham has positioned himself that -- with having a lot of experience with foreign policy and that's why he should be president. In your personal view does this experience -- would this experience be good with this type of deal in maintaining or helping future deals? Is he the leader we need?

HANNAH:

Are you ready for an endorsement?

LIEBERMAN:

Yeah. Well, he's a great friend. So I'm going to answer it quickly, because I know others want to talk about the negotiations with Iran. I mean Lindsey is extraordinarily experienced and informed on matters of Foreign and Defense Policy, and is a -- is capable of making tough decisions.

So I have a lot of respect in addition to affection for him. He has been quite outspoken on the question of these negotiations. Probably as outspoken against the direction they are taking as anybody has been, so you could expect that either -- well, between now and then in his role in the Congress, including as the chair now of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, the Senate Appropriations, that he will be trying to use that leverage in various ways to either inhibit a bad agreement, or strengthen our allies in the region.

HANNAH:

Fred (ph) in the back.

QUESTION:

Fred Fleitz with the Center for Security Policy. I have a question for Senator Lieberman. Senator, a member of the panel, Olli Heinonen, has said that Iran has yet to provide a convincing explanation for why it is enriching uranium.

Now, Prime Minister Netanyahu said there's only purpose Iran is enriching uranium, to make nuclear bombs. The Center for Security Policy believes there is no possible reason for an agreement that allows Iran to operate thousands of centrifuges and develop advanced centrifuges during an agreement.

So my question for you, senator, do you think it is possible to have a meaningful nuclear agreement with Iran that allows it to continue to enrich uranium?

LIEBERMAN:

Quite simply and clearly no, I don't. I mean, I thought the original purpose of these negotiations was to stop the Iranian nuclear enrichment program, in return for the sequential elimination of all the economic sanctions, which is quite significant for Iran and quite significant when you think about it, that it has unfortunately nothing to do with its terrible human rights record, with its expansionism in the region, with its support of terrorism.

But to let that enrichment go on, to me just shows that the -- as Ayatollah Khamenei said himself last fall, the Americans obviously want this agreement much more than we do, said he, that's never where you want to be in a negotiation.

QUESTION:

Thank you. Jessica Schulburg (ph) with the Huffington Post. General Hayden, there is a talk about how the deal would put an incredible burden on the intelligence community to detect violations in time to give the president enough time to react. Can you sort of explain to me why the proposed deal would require Iran to follow the additional protocol, which would expand inspections?

Does that put the intelligence community in a better situation than they are now to detect breakout?

HAYDEN:

Anything that adds to the ability of the IAEA to visit quickly where they believe to be a suspect activity would give me a greater confidence and our ability to verify the information.

You know, American intelligence is not without tools here and then frankly I don't think I'm betraying any national secrets to saying that the IAEA is certainly open to suggestions from member states as issues that raised concern which they want to share with the international body.

So there could be, in very positive and open way a cooperative relationship here, that then gets us to the level of confidence that we need. And if Iran is not cheating, and if Iran is truly serious about this agreement, that sort of thing is precisely the sort of thing they should welcome in terms of, you know, I think the term we used when negotiated with the Soviets is "confidence building measures."

HANNAH:

We'll go to the back here.

QUESTION:

Thank you. Chris Bidwell (ph) from the Federation of American Scientists, thank you all for some great presentations. Very informative. I'd like to follow up on something Senator Bayh had talked about. That was the issue of going with the status quo.

If you go with the status quo, it would mean, somebody probably walked away, how significant is it for the continuation of sanctions policy if it's the Iranians who walk away, versus the U.S., especially if the P5, the other P5 members they want to stay with the negotiation?

BAYH:

I think that would certainly be a relevant factor. Certainly, it would affect public opinion about how the American people and possibly other publics perceive such a thing. It may be also why -- I mean, it's conceivable that we're going to get up to a deadline, and it's not unknown in these sorts of situations for the deadlines to be extended even again.

Now, I know we've said June 30th is the final, final drop dead deadline, but it might be that we achieve the status quo by both sides, sort of, realizing that it was not in neither of their interest to be perceived as, quote, "walking away."

And so, the talks went into a hiatus of some kind and would give each side the ability to kind of put their own spin on why an agreement was not reached. But it would -- clearly, it would benefit our position if the Iranians were perceived as being intransigent and just -- and walking away from the talks.

LIEBERMAN:

Yeah. I agree. Evan said earlier and I agree with this too that the status quo is better than a bad deal, and unless we're all shocked by what comes out of the negotiations, it's going to be a very bad deal.

But probably the -- in some ways, the best of all, if I can put it that way, barring a really good deal, would be that the Iranians walk away, that their stubbornness stops a very good deal for them.

And then I think you have the possibility of increasing the economic sanctions on Iran, and having that be done by more than the United States and that give us at least some small hope that sometime in the future Iran would return to the table for a better negotiation.

BAYH:

Just to follow up, I'm expecting a deal. So I'm not expecting the, you know, the situation that you're positing. But I also wouldn't expect us to sort of and announce, "well, we've, you know, given up and are walking away." I don't think we put ourselves in that posture, and that wouldn't be too smart.

I think we -- say, "we haven't given up hope." We haven't gotten there by the deadline, and so, both sides need a period of, you know, for reflection, to see if there's not more they can do to kind of reach something along those lines that would allow each sides to avoid the stigma of being perceived as the cause of the -- of an agreement not having been reached.

HANNAH:

I think we had a question over here in the front.

QUESTION:

Hi, Amit Sharma (ph), Empowerment Capital (ph), former U.S. Treasury. I wanted to see your -- any of your gentlemen's comments on the efficacy of economic sanctions, whether in the context of status quo or in the context of a snap back if we're seeing -- and all have commented on the very real impacts to Iran broadly with respect to economic sanctions.

If the goal and intent for economic sanctions is to target behavior and change behavior, but you're still having very real impacts to retail and commercial legitimate interest in Iran, how does in the context of a snap back or in the content of status quo, more or stronger economic sanctions achieve the goal?

BAYH:

Well, first and my hats off to the people in the Treasury who did a lot of great work on this issue...

LIEBERMAN:

That's true.

BAYH:

... really over an extended period of time and repeatedly coming up with more effective ways to not to put sanctions in place. So the Treasury Department did a great job.

But look, the history of sanctions is that they're not perfect. So there was a previous question about the Iranians finding ways to work around them and so forth, but they are -- they are imposing a real cost upon the Iranian economy, which the regime is, you know, not entirely impervious to.

They are willing to see their public absorb a fair amount of economic pain to pursue their broader objectives, but they're also sensitive to unrest in their society and a variety of other things.

And so, to the extent that the Iranian economy is not growing as robustly as it otherwise might, by definition, that means they have less resources with which to pursue their other objectives, including in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere. So it's not a perfect instrument.

And in particular, when you're dealing -- and there are other countries you're familiar with, I'm sure that we have imposed sanctions on and they're willing to see their publics have imposed upon them a fair amount of economic hardship. But that does mean that the tool -- that they're completely oblivious to the tool.

As a matter of fact, here's another way to answer your question, I don't think they'd be at the table talking today if they weren't feeling some urgency about getting the sanctions removed, which in of itself is probably an argument for trying to maintain a meaningful sanctions regime for as long as we can.

LIEBERMAN:

Well, I agree with that. As you know, there's billions of dollars being held now, which will be -- some has been let go for every month since the interim agreement. But that will be tremendous infusion of capital into Iran.

They've been hurting. And while they are a totalitarian government in that sense, they're not unmindful. They're not a popular government, from everything we know, in their own country.

And to the extent that there is economic deprivation in the country, it creates the possibility of instability and an uprising. So, I think, that -- and incidentally I want to pat Congress on the back, and maybe because we were both in here (ph) patting us on the back. I apologize for that.

But this was going back to what I said my law school teaching experience, this has been a case where Congress inserted itself into foreign policy. And incidentally, going back to what John said, it didn't matter what the party of the administration in the White House was, they didn't want Congress getting involved in this.

But -- for a lot of reasons. They have a broader range of issues they were dealing with, bilaterally, multi-laterally, but Congress got focused on it in a bipartisan way, adopted at the administration, really through the Treasury Department, the last two administrations that did a tremendous job of implementing.

And I agree with Evan, that's the only reason that the Iranians came to the table, and what agitates me is that they're going to walk away from the table with the sanctions being removed, and they're going to have given us very little in terms of the elimination -- there won't be elimination, they'll dial down a little bit on their nuclear weapons program enrichment and all the rest.

And that's why I keep saying I'm fearful it's going to be a very bad deal.

HAYDEN:

Can I just say one point on that with regard to capacity, I mean, there are multiple purposes for sanctions, as you know, there's punishment, there's changing behavior. And then finally, there's reducing capacity.

You've all got our view on whether we're going to get a good, a bad or no deal. We think likely a deal, and not good.

But let's just assume for a minute, let's just fantasize for a moment. We get a good deal. All right. You still have to live -- and I think that's what Senator Lieberman was suggesting, you still have to live with massively increased Iranian capacity, because you now have relieved them of sanctions, and allowed them to gather resources for all the other activities for -- about which they are unrepentant.

BAYH:

I was just going to add one final thing. You know, there are no -- there are no great alternatives here. You're running risks no matter which course of action you take.

But one of the risk we could conceivably be taking under a, quote, unquote, "bad agreement," would be, the Iranians at some point, in their view, sooner than later would get their hands on billions of additional dollars that have piled in bank accounts they don't have access to right now.

If they're allowed to fully export their petroleum capacity once again, reduce the price of oil a little bit, but it's still going to be additional tens of billions of dollars flowing into the Iranian treasury.

So, if we have not given ourselves a grace period to verify their good faith that they're complying with the agreement. If we don't have in place, you know, strict inspections to assure ourselves that they're abiding by the agreement, there's going to be huge additional resources for their ballistic missile program, for what they're doing in Syria and Yemen.

For -- well, if they haven't really in their hearts given up their nuclear aspirations for possible, you know, additional covert activities there. So we are really empowering them with the potential to do a lot of things. And, you know, this is outside the subject of this conference and these negotiations, but,

you know, clearly they are a state sponsor of terrorism. And giving someone like that tens of billions of additional dollars will lead to adverse consequences.

HANNAH:

I wonder if I can just impose on our two senators here to give us some -- a peek inside, come July, let's say we've got a deal, we've got a deal as problematic as you all say.

LIEBERMAN:

Right.

HANNAH:

You're a Democratic senator.

LIEBERMAN:

Yeah.

HANNAH:

What is it like? I mean, what kind of -- we saw -- we saw the administration, the president earlier in the year, I think, call critics of the deal war-mongers. We saw them say, accuse certain members of maybe being political opportunists who were paying more attention to a domestic constituency than to U.S. national interests.

But he is a lame duck president. I mean, what are the kinds of pressures and calculations that you face that make it so difficult to get 13, or 14, or 15 Democratic senators to say this is not a good deal.

LIEBERMAN:

Well, this is a -- this is all about what the Democrats do. I presume the Republican leadership will try to keep all the Republicans in the moment -- which should be the moment of truth here on the vote to - - whether to override the president's veto, over rejection or not.

The president is the titular head of the -- of the Democratic Party. There are a lot of Democrats who like him or feel a kind of responsibility to him. The administration -- the president that hasn't done this a lot, what I am about to say, but he probably would in this case, he'll meet with people -- he'll call people. There hasn't been a lot of that personal outreach to leadership, Democratic leadership, will make it a test of loyalty.

On the other side, there will be, I believe, a very substantial sort of organization of people in the districts of the swing Democratic voters in the Senate and the House, the undecided. And they'll -- the members will have to put this together, and part of it will be -- I mean, in some sense, not this simple really, loyalty to the president. Maybe some of them will agree -- well, the ones who will agree that it's not a bad deal and a good deal will be in the category of those who will not vote to override a veto. But that group in the middle will be effective.

Evan said a fascinating thing, which I think is really important to remember, which is that the Democrats in the House, particularly, are going to be squeezed in the coming days and weeks about the Trade Promotion Authority. And therefore, they're going to come to this vote, if it happens over the summer, with that kind of feeling in their minds.

I just -- forgive me just a moment. This is, you know, old war stories. You took me back to a point, I guess it was 1997, I think, and the Clinton administration.

We had been through the Balance Budget Act. And the Clinton White House had to really work on Democrats to support it. This was Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich coming to this incredible agreement, and it had stuff in it that a lot of Democrats really didn't like, but it ended up creating a surplus in the federal government.

Anyway, a short period of time after that, by historic irony, comes the Trade Promotion Authority Bill, right, as in right now, passed the Senate, and goes to the House.

I got a call from the White House, John Burrow (ph) were both active in the Democratic Leadership Council, a moderate Democratic group. There were more moderate Democrats in those days, but they said, the president is in inviting about 30 of the moderate center- left Democrats who are undecided on Trade Promotion Authority to come down to the White House tomorrow where you and Burrow (ph) - - and I forget who else came out (inaudible) maybe you were there, to join us join us in the pits.

And the president came out and he spoke movingly. We all just spoke from our guts. I thought it was going really well.

John Podesta was the chief of staff to the president then. And as they all left, I waited -- I lingered. And I said, "John, I thought that went well. What do you think?"

He said, "A lot of these people are not happy with us about the Balance Budget Bill that was just passed." He said, "You and everybody else, and the president were really fantastic today. And here's my prediction, tomorrow they're going to feel really badly when they vote against us."

And, OK, long story, but it shows the human dimension to really enormous national security and global issues. And I think Evan may have had a very good point today, many good points, but that one really struck me.

BAYH:

First time for everything.

HANNAH:

Any other questions out in the audience? Yeah, Rafi Danziger (ph).

QUESTION:

Thank you, I'm Rafi Danziger (ph), an adviser to AIPAC (ph). And to -- my question is addressed to Senator Lieberman.

You suggested there might be a greater deal for legislators to lay out the minimal criteria for an acceptable deal. Clearly us -- for us what would be the kind of a list for minimal criteria for good deal?

LIEBERMAN:

Yes. Thank you for asking that question, because I think this is a really critical interim period. Probably it's going to be hard to get time on the floor for this -- I suppose it's possible, somebody could put it on the National Defense Authorization Act, but probably not.

And it may be -- and it's just as effective, maybe expressed in a letter. And I'm thinking we used -- we did this. Congress says this all the time, a letter to the president, to the secretary of State, basically saying here we are, Corker legislation passed.

Now and this will -- presumably if there's an agreement come to us, and we want you to know, Mr. President, Secretary Kerry, that we will have a vote. And these are our minimal terms to accept an agreement. I mean, it's up to Congress what they want to say.

I would certainly say first, anytime, anywhere inspections, bottom-line. Second, to the extent that you can state it, that sanctions be -- not be removed until there is some real proof, evidence, that the Iranians are keeping their part of the bargain.

But I mean others in Congress may have other points of view. I just think it's an important preface to those ultimate votes, because now Congress has set up the procedure in the Corker legislation. Frankly, in some ways in fairness but also to make a point, they ought to express themselves hopefully in an equally bipartisan basis as they brought it for Corker's Bill about what standards they will bring to the vote they will cast on the -- on the agreement.

HANNAH:

Anybody else on the audience? One more right here, OK.

DUBOWITZ:

Right, thanks very much. And thank you very much to the co-chairman of the task force, to John. I just want to ask a question that actually hasn't been touched upon. Two dimensions of Iran's nuclear program that are of concern certainly to the task force.

One is this issue of the Sunset provision. This idea, and I think you've all alluded to this, that this nuclear deal, regardless of their restrictions, many of these restrictions are going to be sun setting, disappearing in 10 years. Most will be gone in 15 years.

And in fact, Iran will emerge with an industrial-size nuclear infrastructure, and not with a one-year breakout, but actually with zero breakout, undetectable breakout, and that may happen even earlier according to President Obama. That may happen at year 13.

So the issue of the Sunset provision, this sort of temporary nature of the nuclear restrictions in exchange for permanent sanctions relief.

And the second key element, you've talked about a verification and inspection, but the Iranians have been stone-walling the IAEA for years on issues of the possible military dimensions of Iran's program,

otherwise known as PMDs. Can you have a proper verification and inspection regime without full disclosure on PMDs, and the ability to actually talk to the scientists and get the documentation to determine what Iran has actually done in the past and what it may still be doing?

HAYDEN:

Mark (ph) I think all of us will have comments but I will just jump in quickly.

I want to talk to -- I want to talk to Fakrizadeh, and I want to talk to him at Parchin. OK. And if we get that, then I'll...

QUESTION:

Can you just say who that -- who that is quickly?

HAYDEN:

Yes, I'm sorry. He's the Oppenheimer of the Iranian nuclear program. And I want to talk to him and I want to do it -- I want to do it at Parchin, which is a facility that these guys have been trying to get to for a decade.

And I know they're not going to find anything at Parchin. I mean, it's been destroyed and paved over. But they still can't get there. And I -- and if you look -- if you look at the four page white paper about what it was we think was agreed, PMDs, previous military dimensions, are something that remain a hope to be resolved at some point in the future.

They're not a prerequisite to signing an agreement. And just going back to my narrow intelligence lane, all right, it creates an increased burden on verification if I don't have high confidence in where the Iranians actually are, not such is fissile material development, but in their weaponization program.

And, you know, we do have intelligence estimates, but they remain estimates. And they have -- for a country that says, "that's not our objective," they refuse to come clean on their past.

And I realize, Mark (ph), that if we insist on that, it's a deal breaker for the Iranians. But I don't know why we have to accept that premise. How can we know their intent, how can we know their capacity for breakout or sneak out, without high confidence in where it is they are right now?

LIEBERMAN:

Absolutely. I mean, I couldn't agree with you more. I would add that as another element to the -- whatever expression by members of Congress on the PMD particularly.

It probably is a deal breaker, but how can you make a deal with a country that won't agree to that kind of reasonable term, and has stiff-armed the IAEA, which I need not remind this audience is not, you know, a branch of the United States government, but of the United Nations.

With apologies, I have to go.

HANNAH:

OK. Thank you.

LIEBERMAN:

Thank you. It's been a wonderful discussion.

HANNAH:

All right. With that we're going to close it out. Mark Dubowitz (ph) has got a few final comments and if people can...

DUBOWITZ:

Thank you, Senator Lieberman. And thank you Michael Hayden, Senator Bayh, John, thank you very much.

And I want to especially thank Ray Takeyh from the Council of Foreign Relations, who actually was the originator of the idea behind the Iran Task Force. So, Ray, thanks for inviting me to be your partner in this.

The task force has 10 memos, that we put out, 10 reports. The 11th memo will be coming out in the next week.

I want to thank Olli Heinonen in particular, who has been a great participant in the task force and brings his extensive experience with the IAEA. Olli is one of the few people in Washington who has actually had spent a lot of time negotiating with Iranian nuclear scientists. And he has a lot of expertise and a lot of war stories about that most pleasant experience.

So taskforceoniran.org is where you'll find the materials, look for more memos, more reports coming from the Task Force. And we welcome a vigorous debate on this issue over the coming months, and again, look forward to seeing all of you at upcoming events. Thank you again.

CQ Transcriptions, June 1, 2015

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