

**Statement of John F. Tierney
Chairman**

Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs

**Oversight Hearing on “Iran: Reality, Options and Consequences.
Part 1 – Iranian People and Attitudes”**

As Prepared for Delivery

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Good morning, and welcome to everyone here today.

Two weeks ago, the President of the United States made the following statement, and I quote, “...*if you’re interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon.*”

A few days later, the Vice President followed up with this line in the sand, and I quote, “*We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon.*” He elaborated, “*Our country and the entire international community cannot stand by as a terror-supporting state fulfills its most aggressive ambitions.*”

Compare this statement to one that Vice President Cheney made just two months before the U.S. invasion of Iraq. I quote, “We will not permit a brutal dictator with ties to terror and a record of feckless aggression to dominate the Middle East and to threaten the United States.”

The Administration’s rhetoric on Iran is becoming more strident and inflammatory; the temperature is rising rapidly. And at the same time – as was the case with the build-up to the Iraq war – much of its decision-making is being made in the utmost of secrecy.

My hope is that this Administration has learned lessons over its nearly seven years in office – lessons about truth, humility and the importance of fully leveling with the American people. It is my hope that any Administration, when faced with such an important foreign policy challenge as Iran, will take a calculated, well-thought out approach with a clear understanding of our long-term security and strategic interests, the varying policy options and their consequences. We must also be aware of what we don’t know and the law of unintended consequences.

Congress should also have learned some lessons over the past seven years, most importantly about the need for vigorous Congressional oversight. Our Constitution

requires and demands that Congress ask the tough questions – questions about whether all other options have been exhausted; about the consequences and true costs of war and whether the President is basing his decisions on an accurate picture of reality. “Trust us” should never be good enough under our Constitutional separation of powers, and it should certainly not be good enough now.

Beginning today, the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs initiates a series of robust, deliberative and focused oversight hearings on a topic that has long been overdue for Congressional examination – U.S. policy towards Iran. Our Constitutional responsibility demands nothing less.

As our series hearing title – “Iran: Reality, Options, and Consequences” – suggests, we will fully explore the many options for dealing with Iran and the consequences of those options.

But let’s not put the cart before the horse. First, let’s learn about Iranians, something we know far too little about.

Fareed Zakaria recently put it this way, *“We’re on a path to irreversible confrontation with a country we know almost nothing about. The United States government has had no diplomats in Iran for almost 30 years. American officials have barely met with any senior Iranian politicians or officials. We have no contact with the country’s vibrant civil society. Iran is a black hole to us – just as Iraq had become in 2003.”*

The reality is that very few people in Washington understand Iran and that many generalize and oversimplify a complex society of 70 million people. We have little-to-no understanding of the attitudes and opinions of ordinary Iranians. We don’t know what the word is on the Iranian street. We don’t fully appreciate Iran’s rich history and how it’s engrained in the Iranian psyche; or about how the Islamic Revolution of 1979 intimately shaped the behavior and livelihoods of a generation of Iranian youth, women and politicians.

The United States has continued to isolate Iran, through the use of unilateral and multilateral economic and trade sanctions. Outside of a few people-to-people exchanges and limited opportunities for travel by academics, journalists and Iranian-Americans, there has been little direct contact with Iran.

So before we start speculating about the prospects for diplomacy or regime change, or the consequences of a U.S. military attack, all of which will be addressed in later hearings before this sub-committee, let’s take a step back and try to understand who the Iranians really are. This fundamental, common-sense approach, unfortunately, was largely missing in the public dialogue leading up to the Iraq war. It will not be missing this time.

We need to ask several basic questions. What makes Iranians tick? What drives and motivates their behavior? Do Iranians want democracy? Are they resoundingly anti-American, or are there opportunities for improvements in our relationship? How can we reintegrate Iran into the global economy and get them to adhere to international human rights standards? And, given our lack of connection over the last thirty years, what don't we know; where are our blind spots?

By understanding Iranians and building our knowledge of the intricacies in our fractured relationship, the Subcommittee will be able to conduct our Constitutionally-mandated oversight; to find out if the current Administration has thought through all of these issues adequately and thoroughly, and to ask tough questions that get to the heart of the myriad of issues involved.

With the support of the Subcommittee members on both sides of the aisle, I am pleased to embark on this series of Iran hearings.

I now yield to the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Mr. Shays.