

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Iran, Hezbollah, and the Threat to the Homeland***

March 21, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Iran, Hezbollah, and the Threat to the Homeland”:

“As the Homeland Security Committee, we are charged with the responsibility of ensuring this nation’s security. In carrying out that mission, we must ask unpopular questions and seek answers which may make people uncomfortable. Today’s hearing title does not pose a question—it makes a statement—Iran, Hezbollah and the threat to the Homeland.

I hope that today’s hearing can provide support for this statement. However, given that no current Federal officials have been asked here to testify today, I am concerned about whether the testimony we receive will be based on current information. As the Homeland Security Committee, it is unusual for us to have a hearing about a perceived threat posed by a foreign country. Our jurisdiction involves the security and safety of this country within our shores.

So before we begin to venture into this new territory, a word of caution is in order. When we examine our relationship with another country, we cannot look at any particular moment in time and pretend that it tells the whole story. We cannot view the politics, history and culture of any other country clearly by seeing a snapshot version.

Our nation’s relationship with Iran cannot be understood by simply looking at this moment in time. Our major break with Iran came in 1979 when employees of the American Embassy in Tehran were taken captive and held as hostages for 444 days. This action presented a direct threat to United States citizens and United States interests. We did not go to war with Iran.

In 1988, Iran, operating through Hezbollah, kidnapped and murdered a U.S. Marine in Lebanon. We did not go to war with Iran.

In 1996, Iran supported a terrorist group that bombed Khobar Towers, a U.S. military residence in Saudi Arabia. That attack killed nineteen U.S. servicemen. We did not go to war with Iran.

In these situations, we seem to follow the advice of Pope John Paul II who said “War is not always inevitable”. Instead of going to war, Republican and Democratic Administrations—Presidents Carter, Reagan, Bush and Clinton---imposed sanctions on Iran.

In recent years, the United States has expanded those sanctions. In 2012, the European Union joined the efforts to sanction Iran. The EU has pledged to halt new imports of Iranian oil in July. In addition, the EU has imposed new banking restrictions on Iran. These restrictions, known as SWIFT code sanctions, will reach into the global banking system and short-circuit Iran’s money transfer mechanisms.

Without the ability to use the international banking system, it is likely that Iran's current 25% inflation rate will rise and wreak economic havoc. Yet, some of my friends on the other side say that sanctions are no longer good enough. They say the possibility that Iran will have a nuclear weapon creates a new urgency.

I agree that if Iran were on the path to creating a nuclear weapon, we would have cause for concern. But Iran is not close to having a nuclear weapon. James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence has testified before the Senate that while Iran is expanding its uranium enrichment program, he doesn't believe they have made the decision to develop a nuclear weapon.

I think the Director of National Intelligence deserves our trust. If we have any questions about Director Clapper's estimation of Iran's capabilities or intentions, we should call him to a classified hearing before this committee. But we should not engage in a public discussion that creates fear and delivers misinformation.

Further, I think by now we should have learned that potential threats from weapons that do not exist should not determine our foreign policy. Potential threats from weapons that do not exist can never again be the reason to consider sacrificing the lives of thousands of Americans in the deserts of a foreign land.

Securing this nation demands that we calmly assess the threats we face, and face-down the threats we know are real. Securing this nation requires both focus and vigilance. Neither can be achieved where there is fear and misinformation."

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