

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Threat to the Homeland: Iran's Extending Influence in the Western Hemisphere***

July 9, 2013 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency hearing entitled “Threat to the Homeland: Iran’s Extending Influence in the Western Hemisphere”:

“The Committee on Homeland Security has conducted numerous hearings examining whether Iran poses a threat to the American homeland. While views on whether this threat is real or perceived is divided, what is clear, is that the United States must remain committed to ensuring that Iran cannot succeed in its efforts to expand its nuclear enrichment program or assert its influence in neighboring regions.

Fortunately, the economic sanctions that have been placed on Iran have been successful. Experts agree that Iran’s economy is weakened, the value of Iran’s currency is at an all-time low, and inflation has increased to over 50%. Without a doubt these sanctions have destabilized Iran to the point where it has sought political and financial support from countries in the Western Hemisphere, including Latin America.

However, according to U.S. Government officials, this outreach has only been marginally successful and the region as a whole has not been receptive to Iranian efforts. The State Department agrees. Two weeks ago, the State Department released its report pursuant to the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012 introduced by Chairman Duncan. Pursuant to the Act, which President Obama signed into law in December 2012, the State Department was directed to conduct a detailed threat assessment of Iran’s growing activity in the Western Hemisphere.

The report, issued on June 27, 2013, found that “As a result of diplomatic outreach, strengthening of allies’ capacity, international nonproliferation efforts, a strong sanctions policy, and Iran’s poor management of its foreign relations, Iranian influence in Latin America and the Caribbean is waning.”

Moreover, the death of Venezuela’s President Chavez and the election of a new President in Iran has changed the landscape of Iran’s relationship with Venezuela and further weakened Iranian ties in the West.

This does not mean that we must not be mindful of Iran’s activities and take necessary measures to curb its efforts. It does mean; however, that we must be careful not to exaggerate the threat beyond what our military, intelligence and State Department has deemed to be the reality. Some have criticized the sanctions we have placed on Iran as too soft, and have suggested taking actions that would lead us on a path to escalation. Yet, clearly the sanctions have been effective. Iran’s isolation from the world community is evidence that sanctions have not been in vain.”

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