WHITE HOUSE NARRATIVES ON THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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WHITE HOUSE NARRATIVES ON THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

Tuesday, May 17, 2016

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:01 a.m., in Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Jason Chaffetz [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Chaffetz, Mica, Turner, Duncan, Jordan, Walberg, Amash, Gosar, Gowdy, Farenthold, Massie, Meadows, DeSantis, Mulvaney, Buck, Walker, Blum, Hice, Russell, Carter, Grothman, Palmer, Cummings, Maloney, Norton, Clay, Lynch, Connolly, Cartwright, Lawrence, DeSaulnier, Welch, and Lujan Grisham.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Good morning. The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess at any time.

Today's hearing is entitled "The White House Narratives on the Iran Nuclear Deal." I think this is important that we take this up and deal with this situation.

As we get going, there are three items I would ask unanimous consent to enter into the record. The first is the New York Times Magazine article "The aspiring novelist who became Obama's foreign policy guru."

The second is a letter from the White House of May 16. This is a letter addressed to me, copied to the ranking member, Mr. Cummings, and it is from Neil Eggleston talking about how the White House would not make Ben Rhodes available to the committee today.

And I would also like to enter into the record a May 16 letter. This is from Senator Cornyn, Senator Mark Kirk, and Senator John Barrasso.

And without objection, I would like to enter these three into the record. Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Iran, it is one of three countries that are still on the state-sponsors of terrorism, and I think it is important that we have some clarity. There are some issues that are outstanding. It is one of the most important foreign policy initiatives that the President has taken forward, but I still think it demands a lot of clarity.

We were hoping that the clarity would be provided by Benjamin Rhodes. He is the assistant to the President and deputy national

security advisor for strategic communications and speechwriting. He is obviously a very talented and trusted person in the White House. I do not doubt his talents and his knowledge. But the deal that had been spun up and sold to the American people I am not sure was as clear as it should have been, and I have serious questions about the transparency, the truthfulness, and when it really ultimately started.

And I think those are legitimate questions as we move forward because here you have a state sponsor of terrorism in Iran and we still don't fully know the answer to a lot of these questions. Now, some may think they know the answers to all these questions, but there is still a shroud of secrecy, and I think this is a very viable thing to look at. Mr. Rhodes was in a unique position to offer this perspective, given his heavy duty and work on this.

What is mystifying to me is how readily available he made himself to the media, but only select media, those in his echo chamber. He showed obviously disdain for people with foreign policy credentials. He showed great disdain for the media themselves. He is entitled to those personal opinions, but he also elected to share those with the New York Times and put them out there. He is also very negative about Congress going so far as to saying could not have a rational discussion—I am summarizing here—with the Congress. So we provided that.

Josh Earnest from the podium there at the White House openly mocked Congress, said that perhaps we should be calling other members up such as Senator Tom Cotton, who should also raise their right hand and swear and affirm and answer questions.

I took that suggestion, shared it with Senator Cotton. We accommodated that. Mr. Cotton, Senator Cotton had agreed, if Mr. Rhodes would be here, to also be here to answer questions and ferret out any of these details. But Mr. Rhodes elected not to speak. Now, he does have a public speaking engagement today. He is out giving a public speech today but refuses to come and speak with Congress.

I am going to play a clip. I have got two clips in my opening statement. And I think you can see where maybe some on the other side of the aisle will say, oh, we know everything about this, it has been thoroughly debated, but I want you to watch this clip. We are going to go to what we call clip B if we could, and let's watch this.

[Video shown.]

Chairman CHAFFETZ. So as you can see there, Victoria Nuland offered what turned out to be absolutely and totally not true. Ms. Psaki, I think, was more candid in that assessment. And then you have this article comes out and basically the administration thought it was in their best interest to spin up the story that negotiations started with a more moderate regime in 2013, but that is not what had happened. That was fiction as well.

I also want to talk about 24 by 7 access. I think the American people were led to believe that Americans with the best interest would have access and be able to see and get in there and go into these nuclear facilities 24/7. So I want to play another clip. This is clip number E or letter E.

[Video shown.]

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thanks. You can take that down.

So, first of all, as somebody pointed out on our committee, I think Mr. Palmer pointed out I don't think Mr. Kerry was the chief negotiator, but that is another point. But the second part of it is, is there 24 by 7 access? Can you access anything, anywhere, any time? Spinning quite a different story as we go along.

We have also heard a lot of numbers related to sanctions relief and dealing with escrowed oil funds. President Obama was quoted in an Atlantic article talking about $150 billion that would be going back to Iran. The Iranians say they have access to $100 billion. The Treasury Department says it is $50 billion. Secretary Kerry said they have only had access to $3 billion, and then blamed Treasury, talking about a lot of money going to a state sponsor of terrorism.

There are also questions about ballistic missiles. In December 2015 he said there was a violation of the United Nations Resolution 2231 in testimony by the Iran Deal coordinator, Ambassador Mull. But in March of 2016 you have the United States Ambassador Power to the United Nations who toned it down a little bit. Now, they are calling it just an "inconsistent with" is their quote, as opposed to a violation of the United Nations resolution.

Then you also have issues about boosting Iran's economy. Secretary Kerry is currently on tour in Europe. The State Department suggests that we are obligated, we are obligated, the United States of American is obligated to boost the Iranian economy, again, something we need to understand. We don't understand the side deals. There are still sanctions of terrorism on Iran. We want to understand that.

And then there are questions about everything that has actually been agreed to not just in writing but the side deals and any other verbal commitments that were also made.

I would also note to our colleagues that the chairman of Armed Services, Mr. Thornberry, has a very important amendment I think we should all consider and look at that will be part of the NDAA issue as we move forward.

Again, there are a lot of outstanding questions. We wanted to get the person who is right in the thick of things from the White House to come here and testify. The White House on Thursday claimed that this wasn't about executive privilege, and then less than 24 hours before this hearing, they reversed course and said, oh, it is about executive privilege. Now, who is being inconsistent? Who is being inconsistent?

You have plenty of time, Mr. Rhodes, to go out and talk to all the media friends and talk to the echo chamber that you brag about in the New York Times, but when it comes time to actually answer hard questions under oath did you decide not to do it.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. My time has far exceeded what we had allocated. We will now recognize the ranking member, Mr. Cummings.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I thank all our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Chairman, sitting here today, I am surprised and—I mean, very surprised and shocked that you would invite John Hannah to testify before our committee as an expert witness, particularly on the subject of false White House narratives. Mr. Hannah was Vice President Dick Cheney's top national security advisor in the White

House. He personally, personally helped prepare Secretary of State Colin Powell's infamous speech to the United Nations in the run-up to the Iraq War, a speech that Secretary Powell has called a permanent blot on his record.

Mr. Hannah was identified by the Iraqi National Congress as "principal point of contact" in the Vice President's office. The INC was an organization that supplied our nation with reams, with reams of false information about weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Hannah worked directly for Scooter Libby who was convicted after the Bush administration leaked the identity of a covert CIA agent Valerie Plame. Her husband, Ambassador Joe Wilson, had publicly debunked the administration's false claims about the Iraqi nuclear program.

This was the same Scooter Libby who told the FBI that it was "possible" that Vice President Cheney actually directed him to leak information about Ms. Plame's covert status. That is Mr. Hannah.

Now, I don't know Mr. Hannah and I don't believe I have ever met him before today, but based on the public record alone, let me say this. If our goal is to hear from an expert who actually promoted false, false White House narratives, then I think you picked the right person. But if our goal is to hear from someone who was not involved in one of the biggest misrepresentations in our nation's history, then you picked the wrong person.

Listening to John Hannah criticize anyone else for pushing a false White House narrative is beyond ironic. He and Dick Cheney and their colleagues in the White House wrote the how-to manual on this. The profound tragedy here is that thousands, thousands of U.S. service members from our districts were killed in Iraq and thousands more sustained terrible injuries. The American taxpayers have now spent hundreds of billions, billions of dollars even by the most conservative estimates.

Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, you rushed to invite Mr. Hannah without consulting anyone. In fact, this entire panel has been stacked with hand-picked witnesses who all oppose the Iran agreement. You did not invite prominent Republicans like Brent Scowcroft or Richard Lugar. You did not invite any of the dozens of generals or admirals or other military experts who support this agreement.

Other committees have held dozens of substantive hearings on the Iran agreement, but do you know how many this committee has held? Zero. The Subcommittee on National Security held one last November, but that was it, nothing at the committee level. Yet all of a sudden now our committee is rushing to hold today's hearing without even the one-week notice required by the House rules according to the parliamentarian.

These experts here are all repeating the same talking points for the same Republican political narrative. This committee has basically created its own Republican echo chamber.

With respect to Ben Rhodes, I am struggling to understand the allegations against him. If I understand it correctly, Republicans accuse him of misleading the American people by claiming that nothing happened with Iran before 2013 when they elected a so-called moderate president. Republicans claim that if the Americans

just knew the president was working towards an agreement before 2013, they would have rejected the deal.

Of course, this is absurd. There are dozens of public press reports from every single year of the Obama administration documenting how they were working to reach out to Iran with varying degrees of success. All you have to do is Google it. From the time President Barack Obama was a candidate for President until today, press reports are full of accounts of how letters were being exchanged, meetings were being held, and negotiations were being launched.

The Republicans rushed to hold this hearing not as a way to obtain substantive information about the merits of the Iran agreement or even to investigate a legitimate allegation. Instead, this hearing is exactly what it purports to condemn, a partisan narrative designed to mislead the American people. That is not just ironic, that is hypocritical.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back, and I thank the witnesses again for being here.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.

The prime witness that we had invited, Mr. Rhodes from the White House, declined to come before the committee. We are disappointed in his failure to appear.

The chair also notes that contingent upon Mr. Rhodes appearing, an invitation to appear was extended to the Honorable Tom Cotton, United States Senator from the State of Arkansas. This was done at a request of the White House. Given that Mr. Rhodes had refused to appear before the committee today, the distinguished Senator from Arkansas is also excused.

Mr. GOWDY. Mr. Chairman?

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yes, the gentleman from South Carolina.

Mr. GOWDY. I have an inquiry.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yes.

Mr. GOWDY. Is Mr. Hannah here?

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yes.

Mr. GOWDY. Well, then why did Mr. Cummings ask him the questions? He will have a chance to ask Mr. Hannah whatever questions he wants to ask him. We don't have a chance to ask Mr. Rhodes the questions we want to ask because he didn't bother to show up ——

Mr. CUMMINGS. Will the chairman yield?

Mr. GOWDY.—but Mr. Hannah did.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Will the chairman yield?

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yes.

Mr. CUMMINGS. I can say whatever I want to say in my opening statement.

Mr. GOWDY. Yes, you can. It just needs to be fair.

Mr. CUMMINGS. And I can ——

Mr. GOWDY. That is my point.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Well ——

Mr. GOWDY. Just be fair about it. You can say what you want.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Gentleman will state his inquiry.

Mr. GOWDY. I just wanted to know if he was here.

Mr. CUMMINGS. He is here.

Mr. GOWDY. And you tell me he is.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. GOWDY. Okay.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. And Mr. Rhodes is not here.

I would also note that the Democrats were free and usually almost always in my experience invite a Democratic witness, but there is no Democratic witness today because you didn't invite one.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Will the gentleman yield?

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Sure.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Chairman, you know for a fact that we got less than the notice that is required in the rules and did not object and went on with the hearing. You know that.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I disagree ——

Mr. CUMMINGS. All right.

Chairman CHAFFETZ.—with the timing issue that you suggest.

Mr. CUMMINGS. You gave us the required time?

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yes.

Mr. CUMMINGS. I disagree with you.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Okay. We will sort that out. We have a good working relationship, Mr. Cummings and I, but ——

Mr. GOWDY. Parliamentary inquiry.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The gentleman from South Carolina.

Mr. GOWDY. Does the executive privilege apply to media interviews or only to appearances before Congress?

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I don't know the full answer to that, but I believe they are free to talk to whoever they want to in the media, but they did claim in Mr. Eggleston's letter to claim executive privilege.

Mr. GOWDY. So is that a yes or a no? Does it apply when you are being interviewed by the New York Times or ABC or CBS or just when Members of Congress just want to ask questions?

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Evidently just when Members of Congress.

Mr. GOWDY. I thank the chairman for that clarification.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you. We are going to continue with the hearing. We do have Mr. Michael Rubin. He is the resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute; Mr. Michael Doran, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute; and Mr. John Hannah, senior counselor at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. We welcome you all and thank you for being here.

Pursuant to committee rules, all witnesses are to be sworn before they testify. And if you will please rise and raise your right hand.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you. Let the record reflect that all witnesses answered in the affirmative.

We would appreciate you limiting your verbal comments to 5 minutes. It will give us time to ask you questions. And your entire written statement will be entered into the record.

I now recognize Mr. Rubin for his opening statement.

WITNESS STATEMENTS

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL RUBIN

Mr. RUBIN. Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, honorable members, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.

The major Iran-related issues about which the White House misled when selling the Iran deal were verification. The JCPOA loosened the standard set in South Africa and Libya. It embraced Iran's voluntary compliance with the additional protocol when previously Rouhani had bragged that voluntary compliance allows Iran to reverse course at any time.

It also ignores the problem of offsite research. Have Iranians transferred some nuclear work to labs in North Korea? Under the JCPOA, we will never know.

Another issue in which it misled was Rouhani as a moderate. Rouhani is no moderate. Loyalty to Khomeini's vision was a major theme of his campaign commercials. He stuffed his cabinet with veterans of the Intelligence in effect constructing not a reformist cabinet but a KGB cabinet. In 2005 he laid out a doctrine of surprise. Lull the Americans into complacency with dialogue and then deliver a knockout blow. Just last week, he offered full-throated endorsement to the legacy of Qods Force Chief Qassem Soleimani, Iran's master terrorist.

It also misled about who benefits inside Iran. The real tragedy of the deal is it pumps money into the coffers of the Revolutionary Guard. History belies the idea that showering Iran with trade moderates the country or trickles down to ordinary people. Between 1998 and 2005, the European Union almost tripled its trade with Iran and the price of oil quintupled. Iran took its hard currency windfall and invested in its ballistic missile program and its covert nuclear enrichment facilities.

Reformist President Khatami's spokesman bragged about how he had defeated the West. We had an overt policy, which was one of negotiation and confidence-building he said, and a covert policy, which was continuation of the activities. The person in charge of directing the money into the military, Rouhani in his capacity as chairman of the National Security Council.

The problem goes beyond the supreme leader's investment arm. The economic wing of IRGC controls perhaps 40 percent of the economy, including every sector now open for business.

Many of those who supported the JCPOA acknowledge it to be a flawed and faulty agreement but argued the alternative was war. This may have been crafty politics, but it undermined the U.S. position. By creating a binary choice between the JCPOA and war, Rhodes removed credibility to the notion that the Obama administration envisioned the best alternative to negotiated agreement. This played into Iranian hands because they knew no matter what they pushed for, Kerry would concede.

The problem now is that what Rhodes did has become the rule rather than the exception. In my written testimony I detail the long history of diplomats and politicians lying to keep diplomacy alive. Too often they blame political opponents in the United States more than foreign adversaries for the failure at diplomacy.

As I document in Dancing with the Devil: The Perils of Engaging Rogue Regimes, a history of the last half-century of U.S. diplomacy with rogue regimes and terrorist groups, as diplomats proceed with high-level engagement, they too often calibrate it to the fantasy they have constructed rather than reality.

This often leads officials to avoid congressional oversight and, on occasion, to lie to Congress. During the 1990s, senior State Department officials testified that they could draw no direct links between Yasser Arafat and terrorism to avoid triggering an aid cutoff. Declassified documents show Clinton's peace team knew their testimony was false.

Likewise, in 2007 during the Bush administration, Christopher Hill, the State Department's point man on North Korean issues, presented to Congress an artificially rosy picture of the diplomatic process with North Korea in order to keep support for engagement alive, no matter the truth of Pyongyang's behavior.

More recently, diplomats advocating the New START treaty lied, both directly and by omission, to Congress in order to avoid reporting that Russia had been cheating on arms control accords.

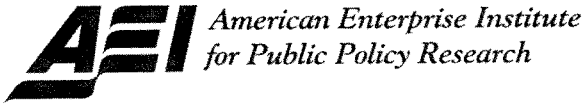
So what to do? Rhodes has placed the security of the United States and its allies at risk. Certainly, any dissemination of falsehoods to Congress and the American people merit a broader investigation. National security and Congress' credibility are at risk. That is not enough. In the past six decades, the U.S. State Department has failed to conduct lessons-learned exercises as to why its high-profile diplomacy with rogue regimes has seldom, if ever, succeeded.

Conducting a broader review is not to criminalize policy debate; that would be poisonous and counterproductive. But if the State Department refuses due diligence, it would be beneficial if Congress would examine diplomacy leading up to the JCPOA if only to ensure that the same mistakes are not made for a seventh time. There should be bipartisan consensus. Even supporters of the deal acknowledge serious concerns about its flaws, so, too, do most serious arms control and counterproliferation experts outside of the echo chamber about whose crafting Rhodes bragged.

One final point if I may, I'm concerned that perhaps by creating an echo chamber and solely talking to people within it, in effect what Rhodes did was create a propaganda operation in which he entrapped none other than Secretary of State John Kerry. Did Secretary of State Kerry talk to people outside the echo chamber? If not, he's a victim of Ben Rhodes as well.

Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Rubin follows:]



Statement before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
On "White House Narratives on the Iran Nuclear Deal"

How White House Spin Undercuts US National Security

Michael Rubin

Resident Scholar

American Enterprise Institute

May 17, 2016

The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the American Enterprise Institute.

Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, Honorable Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding how the White House strategy to craft a false narrative to sell the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has undermined US national security and empowered Iran.

David Samuels' *New York Times Magazine* profile of Ben Rhodes, Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications for President Barack Obama, has generated controversy in both the press and public with regard to the cynicism with which the Obama administration operated behind the scenes to sell its Iran deal to the American people. Samuels documents how Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry ignored Central Intelligence Agency assessments about the character and beliefs of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, crafted a false narrative exaggerating the benefits of the deal, delegitimized genuine criticism of the JCPOA as warmongering, and worked to deceive Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel by suggesting Obama was sincere in his stated commitment to deny Iran a nuclear weapons capability.

The Consequences of Spin

Much of the response in the press and political circles has been to attack Samuels or defend journalists Jeffrey Goldberg and Laura Rozen, whom Rhodes and his team boasted about using to push forward the White House line. Others have said that the revelations about the timeline of negotiations were, in effect, nothing new.[1] All of this, however, distracts from the substance of the issue, one made more relevant by the fact that no one in the administration who cooperated with the profile including Rhodes himself has disputed the quotations or factual content.

The damage done by the Obama administration's deceit is grave. Rhodes suggests that the Obama administration pushed a narrative depicting Iranian President Hassan Rouhani as a moderate when both Iran experts at the Central Intelligence Agency as well as many Iran watchers outside the echo chamber which Rhodes bragged about creating understood that Rouhani was no reformer. To convince Congress and the American people that Rouhani was more moderate than reality would suggest was key to the White House's argument that he was essentially a Deng Xiaoping figure who could reform the system from within. In essence, the White House argued that any fault in the Iran deal—especially given its sunset clause—could be offset by the gamble that Rouhani might fundamentally change the nature of the Islamic Republic. What Rhodes reveals, however, is that the Obama administration knowingly left the Islamic Republic with an industrial-scale nuclear program capable of building not only a bomb but also an arsenal when the White House understood that the that Iranian regime—which would have unfettered nuclear access upon the expiration of the JCPOA—would not be fundamentally different than it is now.

The lies—there is no better word—about the JCPOA to which Rhodes now admits under the guise of creating a narrative are many, and their consequences severe. Below are the major Iran-related issues about which the White House misled when selling the Iran deal:

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[1] Suzanne Maloney, "Deception and the Iran Deal: Did the Obama Administration Mislead America, or Did the Rhodes Profile?" Brookings Institution, May 11, 2016.

- **Verification.** The notion that the JCPOA includes unprecedented verification mechanisms is false. In fact, the compromises to which Kerry agreed erode significantly the standard set by past precedent. Take South Africa, for example. In 1991, after years of doubling down on Apartheid and pursuing a covert nuclear program, South Africa agreed to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. To verify the completeness of South Africa's declaration of inventory of nuclear material and facilities, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) required the South African government provide more than two decades of past records into South Africa's nuclear program in order to trace and account for all nuclear material in South Africa's possession and to verify that South Africa was in compliance. Even though South Africa had a much simpler program than Iran, it still took the IAEA almost two decades to fulfill that mission.

  Likewise, when Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi agreed to come in from the cold in 2003, the international community required Libya to dismantle physically its nuclear infrastructure. Again, the JCPOA fell short of this standard, not only allowing Iran to maintain even its underground facilities, but also ensuring that any new country of proliferation concern can keep its infrastructure intact.

  And, while Kerry solicited a promise from Iran to abide by the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, this was déjà vu all over again for Tehran. On April 5, 2009, none other than Rouhani explained that Iran had previously voluntarily agreed to an enrichment suspension only to be able to reverse that suspension at any time without legal complications.[2] In effect, absent any Iranian ratification of the Additional Protocol—a step it has yet to take formally—then any inspection regime is at best the 127th most rigorous counterproliferation regime, after the 126 other countries which have ratified the Additional Protocol. Nor does the JCPOA address the fact that the IAEA is not by its own statues and bylaws able to inspect undeclared nuclear facilities.

  A final verification loophole is that the JCPOA does not address off-site research, for example modeling or explosives work that Iranian scientists and engineers might conduct in North Korea.

- **Rouhani as Moderate.** The JCPOA puts great faith in the sincerity of Rouhani and his political allies. But the notion that Rouhani is moderate or is at odds with the Supreme Leader in any significant way is belied by his statements and his record. Evidence of Rouhani's ideological fealty to the vision of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini predominates. During the run up to the 2013 election, for example, Rouhani's campaign commercials bragged about how Rouhani was the first person to refer to Khomeini as "Imam," in effect, bestowing upon him messianic overtones. And while Rouhani did remove many of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps veterans from cabinet posts, he simply replaced them with veterans of the Intelligence Ministry. In effect, he presides not over a reformist cabinet but over Iran's equivalent of a KGB cabinet.

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[2] "Rouhani: Mohuriyat-e 'Tawlid' Sha'ar-e Entehabatiam dar Sorat Hazur Ast," *Aftab* (Tehran), April 5, 2009.

Rouhani's own words show a desire not to win compromise with the United States but rather to defeat it. In 2005, as he defended his 17-year legacy as chairman of the Supreme National Security Council at a gathering of regime notables in Mashhad, he reviewed a quarter-century of conflict between Washington and Tehran and argued that the Islamic Republic had always emerged victorious because of a doctrine of surprise:

> In all phases—the plots and plans they had designed against the revolution or against the development of the regime and the nation were defeated. Why? Again it was because they were taken by surprise. The actions of the regime took the world by surprise and they were usually unpredictable. One of the reasons for the world's anger at the Islamic Republic of Iran regime is that they do not have the power to make predictions about this regime. They do not know what we will do a month from now.[3]

Indeed, just in the last week, Rouhani spoke of his 30-year friendship with Qassem Soleimani, head of the Qods Force, a unit culpable in the deaths of several hundred Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as a group responsible for a recent plot to detonate a car bomb less than a mile from where we now sit.[4] Rouhani praised Qods Force operational reach in places such as Syria, where it is responsible for mass murder, as well as the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where its support goes not to those Palestinians seeking a two-state solution but rather those such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad responsible for terrorism and the deaths of American citizens.[5] To whitewash such behavior is to calibrate US policy to a fantasy rather than prepare it to confront reality.

- **Who Benefits Inside Iran?** The false White House narrative also endangered American security by obfuscating the real Iranian beneficiaries of the JCPOA. Acting State Department Spokesman Marie Harf, for example, insisted that Iran would use the unfrozen assets and new investment to rebuild its economy.[6] The attempt to moderate Iran with trade has precedent, but this story line reflects not only ignorance of recent Iranian history, but also profound misunderstanding of the Iranian economy. Between 1998 and 2005, the European Union almost tripled its trade with Iran on the philosophy that the "China model" might work and greater ties between Iran and the West might lead to political liberalization. At the same time, the price of oil—and therefore Iran's income—nearly quintupled. Iran took its hard currency windfall and invested it in its ballistic missile program and its still covert nuclear enrichment facilities. This coincided not with the hardline Ahmadinejad administration, but rather his predecessor, Mohammad Khatami, who all the while spoke of

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[3] Hassan Rouhani, "Iran's Measures Rob the Americans for Foresight," February 9, 2005 speech at Ferdowsi University Hall. *Rahbord* (Journal of the Expediency Council's Center for Strategic Studies, Tehran), Spring 2005.
[4] US Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "Two Men Charged in Alleged Plot to Assassinate Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States," October, 11 2011.
[5] Hassan Rouhani, "Matn-e Sokhnan Ra'is Jomhuri dar Jama'e Samimi va Purshur Mardam-e Astan-e Kerman," Presidency of Iran, May 10, 2016.
[6] Marie Harf, State Department Daily Briefing, April 17, 2015.

"Dialogue of Civilizations." Indeed, this was deliberate. Khatami's spokesman later bragged that the purpose of dialogue was not to compromise but rather to build confidence and avoid sanctions. "We had an overt policy, which was one of negotiation and confidence building, and a covert policy, which was continuation of the activities," he explained.[7] Meanwhile, the official directing the money into the military was none other than Hassan Rouhani in his capacity as chairman of the Supreme National Security Council.

The notion that money from either unfrozen assets or new investment will trickle down to ordinary Iranians is also wrong. Beginning in the late 1980s, the economic and engineering wings of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps increasingly moved into the private sector. The idea among its leadership was to build up a financial base independent of the Iranian clerical and political leadership in order to preserve the Guards in event revolutionary fervor at the political level declined. Today, by some estimates, the Revolutionary Guards' economic wing—*Gharargah-e Sazandegi-ye Khatam al-Anbiya*, often simply called Khatam al-Anbiya or GHORB—and the Islamic Republic's *bonyads* (revolutionary foundations) control 40 percent of the economy. They dominate in the oil sector, heavy construction, manufacturing, and electronics, the exact sectors in which Western firms now invest.[8] In effect, rather than design the deal to benefit the Iranian public, the JCPOA pumps money directly into the coffers of the most hardline elements within Iran. The $50 billion windfall is, in effect, equivalent to 20 times the annual budget of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Many of those who supported the JCPOA acknowledged it to be a flawed and faulty agreement, but argued that the alternative was war. While Rhodes may have believed this talking point useful as part of a political strategy to place JCPOA critics on the defensive, what he really did was undermine the negotiating position of the United States in the crucial final weeks of talks. By creating a binary choice between the JCPOA and war, Rhodes effectively removed any credibility to the notion that the Obama administration envisioned a best alternative to a negotiated agreement should Iranian compromises and concessions fail to address adequately regional security concerns. This played into Iranian hands. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif played hardball, and Kerry conceded to language which loosened restrictions on Iran's ballistic missile program. Again, this played into a strategy Rouhani had earlier articulated in Persian to advance Iran's nuclear program—or at least keep Tehran's options open—on the basis of allowing dual use work. As Rouhani explained, "The basis of the discussion is that a nation that has the power to prepare nuclear power plant fuel also has the power to produce an atomic bomb. All the conflicts are about the fact that these resources can have dual uses."[9]

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[7] Fars News Agency (Tehran), "Ramezanzadeh: Siyasat-e Post Perdeh Dawlat-e Khatami Adameh-e Fa'liyatha-ye Hasteha-ye Bud," June 14, 2008.
[8] Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards Is Turning Theocracy into Military Dictatorship* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2013), pp. 165–203.
[9] Hassan Rouhani, "Iran's Measures Rob the Americans for Foresight," speech at Ferdowsi University Hall, February 9, 2005, in *Rahbord*, Spring 2005.

The Long History of Twisting Intelligence to Bolster Diplomacy

The American public may be outraged at the idea that the White House or State Department would whitewash the behavior of a terror sponsor and rogue regime, but creating narratives around a mirage rather than an adversary's reality has, regrettably, become the rule rather than the exception. When presidents or secretaries of state launch a diplomatic initiative to engage rogue regimes, too often they will twist intelligence and even lie to Congress in order to avoid acknowledging failure or to justify the continuation of that policy. President Lyndon B. Johnson compared the impact of the intelligence community on his political directives to his cow Bessie spoiling a bucket of milk. "You know, that's what these intelligence guys do," he said. "You work hard and get a good program or policy going, and they swing a sh-t-smeared tail through it."[10]

During the Cold War, successive administrations would either downplay intelligence to justify continuation of their outreach to the Soviet Union or try to undermine the agencies raising concern. The Nixon administration, for example, slashed the budget of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) after some senators used its findings to criticize US concessions in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I).[11] In effect, Nixon was worried more about critics of his concessions than the trustworthiness of his adversary. History proved those seeking more caution correct. Rather than usher in an era of security, the 1972 anti-ballistic missile agreement, which concluded the talks and were incorporated into the treaty, coincided with Soviet upgrades to the size and lethality of its nuclear arsenal.[12] State Department clashes with the ACDA continued into the 1980s. Dov Zakheim, a longtime Pentagon official and expert, and Robin Ranger, consultant to the US Institute of Peace, explained why: "The Department of State finds life without enforcement of treaties politically easier. Ignoring compliance policy allows the many arms control enthusiasts in and out of government freely to develop schemes without worrying about enforcement."[13]

No president before Obama had so enthusiastically embraced dialogue with adversaries as Jimmy Carter. Donald H. Rumsfeld, then serving as Gerard Ford's defense secretary, recalled how, as he briefed Carter and his national security team for the transition, Carter reported that he had an "unprecedented" communication from Moscow expressing the desire interest in new arms control talks.[14] When Carter wanted nothing to stand in the way of his SALT II talks. Against the wishes of his European allies, he omitted the Soviet Union's SS-20 intermediate-range nuclear missiles from the agenda to avoid creating an impasse in negotiations.[15] In an October 1, 1979 television address,

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[10] Robert Gates, "An Opportunity Unfulfilled: The Use and Perceptions of Intelligence at the White House," *Washington Quarterly*, Winter 1989, p. 42

[11] Thomas Graham Jr., former Acting Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, statement to the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, US Senate, May 15, 2008.

[12] Robert Jastrow "Reagan vs. the Scientists: Why the President Is Right About Missile Defense," *Commentary*, January 1984, p. 24.

[13] Robin Ranger and Dov S. Zakheim "More Than Ever, Arms Control Demands Compliance," *Orbis*, Spring 1990, pp. 217-218.

[14] Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), p. 239.

[15] Gerhard Wettig "The Last Soviet Offensive in the Cold War: Emergence and Development of the Campaign Against NATO Euromissiles, 1979-1983," *Cold War History*, February 2009, p. 85.

Carter sang SALT II's praises but even the Democrat-controlled Senate refused to ratify the agreement. Carter's team, may have drunk the Kool-Aid, but Congress took its "advice and consent" role seriously and refused to compromise US national security for the sake of party loyalty.

While intelligence analysts embraced more healthy skepticism than diplomats, both worried that Ronald Reagan's election meant that the pendulum might have swung too far in a direction hostile to diplomacy. Carter may have been too credulous of diplomatic outreach, but many diplomats and analysts worried that Reagan had an itchy trigger finger. Accordingly, many American officials bent over backward to exculpate Soviet cheating on the biological weapons. In the "yellow rain" controversy, they dismissed reports of Soviet biological weapons use in Southeast Asia, suggesting the biological weapons attacks were just naturally occurring pollen mixed with bee feces.[16] Likewise, some US officials dismissed reports of an anthrax outbreak in Sverdlovsk as food poisoning, even though the anthrax was airborne and infected hundreds.[17] Simply put, no amount of evidence of Soviet insincerity was enough to convince proponents of diplomatic engagement that the problem for the lack of diplomatic success lay with American adversaries rather than critics of diplomatic engagement in Washington. It was only after Soviet officials themselves acknowledged they had cheated on the Biological Weapons Convention that the debate became moot.[18]

The problem of American diplomats treating enemies' sincerity with too much credulity has only accelerated in recent years. In 1988, when US satellites detected a new 200 yard-long and six-story-high structure at Yongbyon, North Korea, some analysts, eager to avoid conflict, suggested that the building might be a factory producing something akin to nylon.[19] It was a nonsense theory, but it was enough to avoid a cut-and-dry finding of North Korean cheating. Reality always triumphs over bureaucratic talking points, although the damage of such maneuvers only increases the ultimate cost of conflict. In this case, North Korea was working on a covert nuclear program.

Bill Clinton subsequently launched a high-profile diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang. As has become the pattern when negotiating with Palestinians, Iraqis, and Iranians, preservation of talks with North Korea trumped their content or quality of agreements. Rather than punish Pyongyang for its illegal activities, Clinton turned on critics of the deal. Just like Obama did two decades later with Israel and America's moderate Arab allies, Clinton sought to cut off South Korea and Japan from any substantive input as the deal was being finalized. When South Korean President Kim Young Sam told *The New York Times* that North Korea was simply buying time and essentially taking

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[16] Jonathan B. Tucker "The 'Yellow Rain' Controversy: Lessons for Arms Control Compliance," *Nonproliferation Review*, Spring 2001, pp. 32–33; Philip M. Boffey, "Washington Talk: Chemical Warfare; Declassified Cables Add to Doubts About U.S. Disclosures on 'Yellow Rain,'" *New York Times*, August 31, 1987, p. A14.

[17] Elisa D. Harris "Sverdlovsk and Yellow Rain: Two Cases of Soviet Noncompliance?" *International Security*, Spring 1987, pp. 53–55.

[18] Jan T. Knoph and Kristina S. Westerdahl "Re-Evaluating Russia's Biological Weapons Policy, as Reflected in the Criminal Code and Official Admissions: Insubordination Leading to a President's Subordination," *Critical Reviews in Microbiology*, Vol. 32, 1996, p. 2.

[19] Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), p. 6.

advantage of American desperation for an agreement, the State Department was angry.[20] When he repeated his criticism the next year, Clinton was furious and treated the South Korean leader with the same sort of disdain that Obama later bestowed on Netanyahu.[21] When presidents tie their prestige to high-profile diplomacy, they often treat adversaries with greater consideration than allies. It seldom makes enemies any less hostile; quite the contrary, it often emboldens them by convincing them that US commitment to allies is less than solid.

By 1997, the Agreed Framework had failed, but the State Department would not accept the intelligence community's finding to that effect. Nicholas Burns, the State Department spokesman who today is a prominent supporter of the JCPOA, said, "We are absolutely confident . . . that the Agreed Framework, put in place two and a half years ago is in place, it's working. We are absolutely clear that North Korea's nuclear program has been frozen and will remain frozen."[22] Stephen Bosworth, the US ambassador to South Korea, also insisted that the Agreed Framework was on track.[23] Nothing was further from the truth.

When, in 1999, the General Accounting Office (GAO) reported that it could no longer verify how North Korea distributed or used the food aid, which was to be strictly regulated by agreement, the State Department refused to accept the GAO findings.[24] Likewise, when the GAO reported that North Korea had violated agreements on monitoring heavy fuel oil, the State Department informed Congress of its trust that the regime's use of the heavy fuel oil was consistent with the Agreed Framework.[25] Congress did not buy the story. In an angry exchange of letters, Secretary of State Warren Christopher effectively covered up North Korean noncompliance, and the State Department insisted that the Agreed Framework was "a concrete success."[26] It was anything but the case, but with personal legacies at stake, few of those so invested in the Agreed Framework have been willing to call it a failure, even today.

Perhaps one of the most troubling aspects of American diplomatic practice has been the willingness of senior State Department officials to lie to Congress in order to keep engagement alive or to protect adversaries from the legal consequences of their actions. As I document in *Dancing with the Devil: The Perils of Engaging Rogue Regimes*, a study of a half-century of US diplomacy with rogue regimes and terrorist groups, during the 1990s, senior State Department officials regularly testified in Congress that they could draw no direct links between Yasser Arafat, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and terrorism. To do so would violate the PLO Commitments Compliance Act, which forbade US aid to the Palestinian Authority unless the State Department could certify that it had

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[20] David E. Sanger "Seoul's Leader Says North Is Manipulating U.S. on Nuclear Issue," *New York Times*, July 2, 1993.
[21] Wit et al., *Going Critical*, pp. 314–315.
[22] Nicholas Burns, State Department Daily Press Briefing, June 9, 1997.
[23] Yonhap News Agency (Seoul), "US Envoy Says Four-Way Preferable to Six-Way Talks on Korean Peace," October 20, 1998.
[24] US General Accounting Office, "Foreign Assistance: North Korea Restricts Food Aid Monitoring," GAO/NSIAD-00-35, October 1999.
[25] General Accounting Office, "Nuclear Nonproliferation: Status of Heavy Fuel Oil Delivered to North Korea Under the Agreed Framework," GAO/RCED-99-276, September 1999.
[26] Wit et al., *Going Critical*, pp. 314–315; James B. Foley, State Department Daily Press Briefing, August 25, 1999.

no terror links. Declassified documents, however, suggests that senior members of Clinton's peace team knew that their testimony was false. They simply believed that keeping dialogue alive trumped US law and the democratic will of Congress. A similar problem exists with North Korea. In 2007, Christopher Hill, the State Department's point man on North Korean nuclear issues, presented to Congress an artificially rosy picture of the diplomatic process with North Korea, also to keep support for engagement alive, no matter the truth of Pyongyang's behavior.[27]

This pattern reached a fever pitch under the Obama administration's Russia "reset" policy. Consider that, on June 27, 2010, three days after Russian President Dmitri Medvedev visited the White House, the FBI arrested 10 Russian spies. The bust raised questions not only about Russian behavior, but also about just how well efforts to improve relations with the Kremlin were going. The White House, however, was determined not to let Russian subterfuge disrupt diplomacy.[28] US officials released the Russian agents quickly, raising eyebrows among former intelligence officials. "We have to do a damage assessment, and when you do a damage assessment, you want to have access to the individuals involved for an extended period of time so you can get new leads and ask questions," said Michelle Van Cleave, a former head of US counterintelligence. "We lost all that. We lost a clear window into Russian espionage, and my question is: What was the rush?"[29] Simply put, the reason for the rush was that the White House and State Department feared reality would undercut its narrative.

The unwillingness to assess honestly US outreach to the Kremlin has persistently undermined US security. Just as Carter sought to pursue SALT II despite Soviet cheating, Obama was willing to overlook Russian duplicity in order to win agreement on a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). Only after the treaty passed the Senate did reports emerge that the White House and State Department had buried reports about Russian violations of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty so as to remove any impediment to New START's ratification. In effect, senior officials lied to Congress by omission. The ends did not justify the means. Russian President Vladimir Putin is today more dangerous and aggressive than he was before New START.

Conclusions

Rather than calibrate US policy to reality, Rhodes tied policy to a false narrative. By doing so, he has placed the security of the United States and that of many allies at risk. He should be called to testify to explain his actions. Certainly, the knowing dissemination of falsehoods to Congress and the American people merit a broader investigation. Both national security and the credibility of Congress is at risk.

That is not enough, however. In the past six decades if not more, the US State Department has failed to conduct lessons-learned exercises as to why its high-profile diplomacy with rogue regimes has

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[27] Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "The Six Party Process: Progress and Perils in North Korea's Denuclearization," testimony before the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, and Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives, October 25, 2007.

[28] Peter Baker "Despite Arrests, Working to Rebuild Russia Ties," *New York Times*, July 1, 2010, p. A3.

[29] Bill Gertz "Spy Swap Puts Halt to Fact Finding," *Washington Times*, July 13, 2010, p. A1.

seldom if ever succeeded. This stands in sharp contrast to the US military, where introspection in the form of noncommissioned officers pointing out mistakes, after-action reports, and study of past campaigns is part of the culture.

Conducting a broader review is not to criminalize policy debate; that would be poisonous and counterproductive. If the State Department refuses to do its own due-diligence, however, it would be beneficial if Congress would use its oversight responsibilities to examine the Iran diplomacy leading up to the JCPOA, if only to ensure that the same mistakes are not made a sixth or seventh time in future rounds of talks with Iran or other countries. There should be bipartisan consensus on this issue. After all, those senators and representatives who supported the Iran deal acknowledge openly serious concern about its flaws. So too do most serious arms control and counterproliferation experts outside of "echo chamber" about whose crafting Rhodes bragged.

Not only Kerry but also his top aides crafting policy might be called to explain their thought process and strategy at every step of the negotiations and to consider where the inflection points were where different policies or statements might have led to better outcomes. How did they practice before each negotiation round, or did Kerry simply wing it? Officials and aides might explain under oath and in a closed session if necessary what their best alternative to a negotiated settlement was, if indeed they had one. If they did not, they might explain how they believe that impacted Iranian assessments of US credibility. They might also elaborate their strategy to increase American leverage in talks, if indeed there was one.

Congress might also examine the degree to which Kerry's negotiating team limited themselves to the views of the echo chamber about which Rhodes bragged. Did they understand fully how the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps dominated the Iranian economy, or did they simply not care? Was the willingness to loosen the language restricting Iran's ballistic missile work a deliberate concession or the result of incompetence? At what point were other concessions made, such as allowing the Revolutionary Guards to provide sampling from its own facilities or allowing Iran to maintain facilities in direct contravention of the Libya precedent? To what degree did the US political calendar and the personal ambition of key aides undercut American leverage by rushing the conclusion of the deal?

To make a poker analogy, the United States entered into negotiations with Iran with the equivalent of a full house, but ended up losing to a pair of twos. If this was the first time senior US diplomats were so convincingly outplayed by America's enemies, it would be bad enough, but it has become the rule rather than the exception. It is time to stop the strategic slide.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.

I will now go to Mr. Doran of the Hudson Institute. You are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL DORAN

Mr. DORAN. Chairman Chaffetz ——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Sorry, microphone there, please.

Mr. DORAN. Thanks. Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, members of the committee ——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Sorry, if you can move that microphone right up close and comfortable. There you go. Thank you.

Mr. DORAN. Thank you for inviting me to address some of the problems raised by the recent profile New York Times Magazine of Ben Rhodes, the deputy national security advisor for strategic communications. Mr. Rhodes admitted to the New York Times that he created a war room of some two dozen detailees from around the executive branch who came to the White House and monitored all communications—all public communications about the Iran deal, communications coming out of the—Capitol Hill, the think tank world, on social media, and in the traditional media.

He also created what he called an echo chamber. That was a network of sympathetic NGOs, think tanks, and pliant members of the press to whom he ceded narratives, false narratives I would say, about the Iran deal, and then he directed the reporters to these NGOs and think tanks to give seemingly independent verification to the narratives that he put out.

In my view, the creation of the echo chamber and the war room does constitute a deception of the American people and of their representatives. But the question is what were—what exactly was the nature of the deception? And I think to understand that we have to understand the larger policy context, and that is that the strategic goal of the President was to carry out a detente with Iran. It was to end the conflict with Iran as a necessary precondition to pulling the United States back from the Middle East because ending the military engagement in the Middle East, I think, is the President's overall goal.

Now, if the President had been up front about this with the American people and said that he wanted to A) pull the United States out of the Middle East and B) make Iran part of the security architecture of the region, he would have encountered immediately a severe political backlash that would have undermined his whole project. And former Defense Secretary Panetta, former chief of the CIA Panetta said as much to the New York Times Magazine.

Now, that's the need for a propaganda operation that—to deceive the American people. It's not just to misrepresent what's in the Iran deal but to misrepresent everything else that's around it that is the strategic goal of the President in the Middle East.

I'd like to say a few words if I may about what I think were the—what is the anatomy of the deception, that is the main lines of false narrative that the war room and echo chamber put out. And in my prepared statement, I go into more detail about this. I'll just summarize here five major points.

Number one, conjuring moderates. The echo chamber created the impression that Hassan Rouhani, the president of Iran, was a mod-

erate coming to power, representing a wave of moderation in Iran, a desire to fundamentally change relations between Iran and the West. This narrative of the moderates coming to power and the need to support the moderates has been the gift that keeps on giving to President Obama's diplomacy. It creates a pleasing story of a breaking down of barriers. It creates a moral equivalence in political terms between those who are critical of the deal in the United States and hardliners, the supposed enemies of Rouhani in Iraq.

And, importantly, it makes—it lulls us into a false sense of security about all of the concessions that we have made to Iran, and in particular, the sunset component of the nuclear deal, which gives Iran effectively in 10 years a completely legitimate program and the ability to move—nuclear program, and the ability to move quickly toward a weapon. If Iran is moderating, if we have—if we are supporting a process of moderation in Iran, then allowing it to have these capabilities is really no danger.

The second deception is falsifying the chronology of the negotiations, which began much earlier than the election of Rouhani. They go back to July 2012, and they were initiated by the United States.

The third deception is erasing concessions from the United States along the lines of what Dr. Rubin just discussed.

The fourth is hiding the regional cost. The President has in effect recognized Syria as an Iranian sphere of influence, and one of the goals of the deception of Mr. Rhodes is to prevent people from connecting the dots between the Syria policy and the Iranian nuclear policy.

And the fifth part of the deception is blaming allies. The White House on background and in public is very willing to criticize our Sunni allies as creating sectarian extremist in the region. It's willing to criticize in very derogatory terms Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel. It never criticizes the Iranians. You never hear a word from the White House about what the Iranians are doing in Syria in pursuit of the—in support of Assad's murder machine.

I'll just sum up now by what I think we need to do about this, and I would say two points. Number one, I agree with you, Chairman Chaffetz, that we do not actually know what is in the Iran deal. We still to this day don't know, and I completely agree with your assessment about the activities of Secretary of State Kerry. In Europe last week, he was in Europe drumming up business for the Iranians, and the Iranians are saying that this is part of the deal. Is it part of the deal or is it not? We don't know. So I would support further investigation.

And then secondly, I think we have to trim the size of the NSC. It just—I don't see how anyone who looks at this and sees a war room of 22 detailees from around the executive branch in the White House with the job of monitoring communications and creating a false narrative in the media is a legitimate part of the NSC's mission. The NSC should be a coordinating body. It should not be a muscular imperial body running roughshod over all of the executive branch.

So I would add my voice to those who are saying that the NSC should be cut back severely from the 400 members it currently has to something more like 100.

Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Doran follows:]

Hudson Institute

Prepared statement by:

Michael Doran
Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

Before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives

May 17, 2016

White House Narratives on the Iran Nuclear Deal

Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to address some of the problems raised by the recent profile in *The New York Times Magazine* of Ben Rhodes, the deputy national security advisor for strategic communication. Rhodes and key members of his staff openly admitted to David Samuels, the author of the article, that they built a campaign-style war room manned by approximately two-dozen staffers drawn from the State Department, Treasury, and the Department of Defense. The war room monitored the discussion of the Iran nuclear deal—in the traditional press, on social media, in Congress, and in the policy world—and supplied sympathetic reporters with stories, official and unofficial, that supported the goals of the Obama administration.

Simultaneously, Rhodes built up a network of surrogates among NGOs and think tanks who provided the media with seemingly independent verification of those stories. "We created an echo chamber," Rhodes said. "They were saying things that validated what we had given them to say."[1]

Rhodes reportedly bristled when Samuels suggested that the war room and echo chamber were tools of deception. In my view, however, Rhodes did indeed assist the president in deceiving the American people. In order to understand the precise nature of that deception, we must first describe the broad policy context in which the war room and echo chamber operated.

The Iran nuclear deal, we can now see, was but the most visible piece of a much larger policy—namely, rapprochement with Iran as a means of furthering American disengagement from the Middle East. That President Obama has always been dedicated to pulling the United States back from the region is hardly a secret; no serious observer ever doubted for a moment that the president was pursuing a policy of retrenchment. But many well-informed people failed to see just how far his strategy deviated from mainstream

[1] David Samuels, "The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign Policy Guru," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 5, 2016, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/magazine/the-aspiring-novelist-who-became-obamas-foreign-policy-guru.html?_r=0.

foreign policy thinking—from "the Blob," as Ben Rhodes calls it.

Attitudes on this question began to shift considerably after the publication of the April 2016 issue of *The Atlantic,* in which journalist Jeffrey Goldberg revealed the disdain that President Obama harbors not just for the foreign policy elite in Washington but also for America's traditional allies in the Middle East and in Europe. Yet the Goldberg article still obscured the vital connection between Obama's Middle East retrenchment, generally speaking, and, in particular, the nuclear negotiations with Iran. Enter *The New York Times Magazine*. Thanks to David Samuel's extremely illuminating profile of Rhodes, that connection is now starting to come clearly into view.

The Keystone in the Arch

From the moment he took office, Obama recognized a fundamental contradiction between his intention to disengage from the Middle East and the traditional American policy of contesting Iran's hegemonic regional ambitions. His ability to pivot from this troubled region, he understood, depended on developing a more cooperative relationship with Iran, a goal that, in turn, hinged on ending the conflict over the nuclear program. In short, the nuclear negotiations were the keystone in the arch of Obama's grand strategy. "It's the center of the arc," as Rhodes himself explained to Samuels. "It's the possibility of improved relations with adversaries. It's nonproliferation. So all these threads that the president's been spinning … for almost a decade, they kind of all converged around Iran."[2]

Note the timeline—"for almost a decade." Two years before he became President, Obama was already advocating rapprochement with Iran. Indeed, in a major foreign policy speech in 2006, then-Senator Obama argued that Iran and Syria shared a core interest with the United States in bringing stability to Iraq. "It is simply not productive for us not to engage in discussions with Iran and Syria on an issue of such fundamental importance to all of us," he said.[3]

From his first days in office, President Obama made no secret of his desire to improve relations with Tehran. However, he did disguise the centrality of Iran to his regional strategy. The idea of pulling America back from the Middle East while simultaneously treating Iran as a legitimate partner in building a regional security architecture was guaranteed to generate opposition from many quarters—from Israel and from the Saudis, to say nothing of the American people and their representatives. If Obama and his inner circle had publicized his true thinking about Iran, the political backlash would have destroyed their project before it ever got started. They'd have gotten "the [expletive]

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Senator Obama, "A Way Forward in Iraq," Remarks to Chicago Council on Global Affairs, November 20, 2016, available at: http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/obama-offers-his-plan-for-the-iraq-war/article_a83b95e9-0f66-516b-808d-63eb7f90d732.html.

kicked out of them," Leon Panetta told Samuels.[4]

To avoid that fate, Obama proceeded surreptitiously. In 2012, he opened secret, bilateral negotiations with the Iranians on the nuclear question in Oman. Simultaneously, he quietly brought his policies in Lebanon, Iraq, and, especially, Syria into alignment with Iranian interests. In November 2013, the administration announced that it had reached an interim agreement on the nuclear question. That month the existence of the secret Oman channel became known, but few observers understood just how active the Oman channel had been, or what it portended for the future of American foreign policy.

Anatomy of the Deception

Meanwhile, Ben Rhodes was activating his war room and echo chamber, the purpose of which was to hide Obama's grand strategy in plain sight. He and his staff accomplished this by churning out false narratives on a daily basis—stories that misled the public in a great variety of ways, of which the following five are but a small sample.

1) Conjuring Moderates. To hear the echo chamber tell it, relations between the United States and Iran began to change in June 2013 when Hassan Rouhani, cast as a moderate, became the president of Iran and began to guide Iran toward reconciliation with the United States and the international community. According to Leon Panetta, however, this story is a fiction. "There was not much question," Panetta told Samuels, "that the Quds Force and the supreme leader ran that country with a strong arm, and there was not much question that this kind of opposing view could somehow gain any traction."[5]

False though it was, the "ascendancy of the moderates" was (and continues to be) a winning theme for the Obama administration, because it fosters a sense of peaceful convergence. It has turned the thaw in US-Iranian relations into a seemingly grand development analogous to dramatic events in the past such as President Nixon's opening to China or the fall of the Berlin Wall. Moreover, by manufacturing the false impression that the Iranian regime is morphing into a kinder, gentler Islamic Republic, the administration has managed to alleviate concerns that the deal it struck with Tehran will completely remove the most meaningful international restrictions on Iran's nuclear program in just ten years' time.

For the administration, the theme has had the added benefit of knocking critics of Obama, and especially Republicans, back on their heels. Moderates in both Washington and Tehran, so the fiction goes, are reaching out to each other to cooperate against the warmongers in their respective countries. In this telling, domestic American critics of Obama's diplomacy become the moral equals and political allies of Revolutionary Guards in Iran, the latter being the fictive hardline rivals of President Rouhani. President Obama

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[4] David Samuels, "The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign Policy Guru," *New York Times Magazine*, May 5, 2016, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/magazine/the-aspiring-novelist-who-became-obamas-foreign-policy-guru.html?_r=0.

[5] Ibid.

himself drew on this imagery in a speech last August. "It's those hardliners chanting 'Death to America' who have been most opposed to the deal," he said. "They're making common cause with the Republican caucus."[6]

2) Falsifying the Chronology. By disingenuously depicting Rouhani as a sailor on the winds of reform, the echo chamber also fostered the impression that the nuclear negotiations were the result of a strategic shift in Tehran rather than in Washington. "[W]ith the election of a new Iranian President earlier this year, an opening for diplomacy emerged," President Obama commented in November 2013. "Today, that diplomacy opened up a new path toward…a future in which we can verify that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful and that it cannot build a nuclear weapon."[7]

We now know that this version of events is highly misleading. Samuels's interviews with, among others, Jake Sullivan, a principal participant in the Oman negotiations, indicate that the Americans had arrived at the outlines of a deal with the Iranians well before Rouhani even took office.

3) Erasing American Concessions. At every stage of the nuclear negotiations, it was major American concessions that propelled the diplomacy forward. Thanks, in part, to Ben Rhodes and his extensive media network, however, the Obama administration was able to hide this basic fact from the American people. The echo chamber exaggerated the significance of Iranian concessions and overstated the value of the new safeguards and inspections regime that the deal created. When technical experts with stellar, non-partisan reputations, such as the physicist David Albright, made comments suggesting that the administration was overselling the deal, the echo chamber generated a cacophonous din of competing claims – and attacks on those non-partisan experts.

These techniques proved successful in diverting attention from the full significance of a long string of broken promises—including, for example, the administration's claims that it would shutter the underground Fordow facility, compel Tehran to come clean on the military dimensions of its nuclear program, and leave in place the sanctions on the Iranian ballistic missiles.

In order to thwart attempts to investigate reports of preemptive American concessions, the echo chamber backed Obama in his own repeated requests for patience. "When it comes to this nuclear deal," the president said in March 2015, "let's wait until there's actually a deal on the table that Iran has agreed to, at which point everybody can

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[6] President Obama, "Remarks by the president on the Iran Nuclear Deal," Remarks to American University, August 5, 2015, available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/05/remarks-president-iran-nuclear-deal.

[7] President Obama, "Statement By The president On First Step Agreement On Iran's Nuclear Program," November 23, 2013, available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/23/statement-president-first-step-agreement-irans-nuclear-program.

evaluate it; we don't have to speculate."[8] Then, as soon as the Iran deal was announced, the echo chamber proclaimed the discussion of past concessions as futile and unnecessary. All that mattered now was the--utterly false--binary choice: accepting the deal, or going to war. "Let's not mince words," Obama said last August. "The choice we face is ultimately between diplomacy and some form of war — maybe not tomorrow, maybe not three months from now, but soon."[9]

4) Hiding the Regional Cost. Perhaps the president's greatest deception was his misrepresentation of the role that the nuclear deal played in his overall diplomacy. He sold the agreement publicly as a narrow arms control agreement, the only goal of which was to sever Iran's "pathways to a nuclear weapon."[10] In actual fact, it was but one piece of a much larger regional vision. In that vision, the United States would recognize the legitimacy not just of Iran's nuclear program but also of its interests in the Arab world. Primary among these interests, of course, was the position of Iran in Syria, where it was backing the government of Bashar al-Assad against the rebels.

The need here was to convince Tehran of the sincerity of the administration's intentions. Especially relevant in this context are the views of Ambassador Fred Hof, the Director of The Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East at the Atlantic Council. Hof, who was the Obama administration's point man on Syria from 2009 to 2012, now believes that the president, in order to entice Tehran to finalize the nuclear deal, has in fact recognized Syria as an Iranian sphere of influence. "To complicate the ability of Iran's man in Syria [that is, Assad] to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity would have placed at risk nuclear negotiations aimed ultimately at dissolving American relationships of trust and confidence with key regional powers," Hof writes. "Yes, the Blob—the foreign policy establishment—would have had a problem with this. Hence an information operation headed by Rhodes aimed at avoiding head-on debates with the Blob or, for that matter, the representatives of the American people in Congress."[11]

An analysis that is clear as day to Hof, one of the country's top Syria experts, however, is absent from the echo chamber, which works assiduously to obscure the connection between the Iranian nuclear deal and the unimpeded rise of the Iranian-Russian alliance.

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[8] President Obama, "Remarks by the president Before Meeting with Secretary of Defense Carter," March 3, 2015, available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/03/remarks-president-meeting-secretary-defense-carter.

[9] President Obama, "Remarks by the president on the Iran Nuclear Deal," Remarks to American University, August 5, 2015, available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/05/remarks-president-iran-nuclear-deal.

[10] The White House, "Implementation Day Fact Sheet," available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal.

[11] Ibid.

Is the tide finally shifting? Perhaps. Fred Hof is no longer alone among former Obama officials in drawing a connection between Obama's Syria policy and his courtship of Iran. Leon Panetta is another. "I think the whole legacy that he was working on was, 'I'm the guy who's going to bring these wars to an end, and the last goddamn thing I need is to start another war,'" Panetta explained to David Samuels. "If you ratchet up sanctions [on the Iranians], it could cause a war. If you start opposing their interest in Syria, well, that could start a war, too."[12] Unfortunately, the hour is very late, and the damage done, both on the nuclear front and on the front of Iran's regional ambitions, is very great.

5) Blaming Allies. "Our biggest problem was our allies," Vice President Joe Biden told students at Harvard's Kennedy School in October 2014.[13] Speaking about Syria, Biden blamed America's Sunni allies—Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar—for building up the Islamic State in order to weaken Assad. Curiously absent from Biden's treatment of the Syria problem was a serious analysis of the role that Iran and Russia had played in fueling the murder machine of the Syrian dictator, Bashar al-Assad. This was no idiosyncratic lapse: Biden's statements were part of a disciplined White House messaging strategy.

Disciplined, and again also deceptive. As Obama sees it, America's regional allies are problematic not because they actually support ISIS but because they insist that the United States should lead a regional coalition dedicated to contesting the hegemonic aspiration of Iran and its allies. This understanding of the proper American role directly contradicts the president's desire to disengage from the Middle East while bringing Iran and Russia into the regional security architecture. Preferring not to describe his true vision for the region, the president, it seems, has tasked Rhodes to carry out a whisper campaign against the allies, blaming them, not Iran, for the rise of sectarianism in the Middle East.

But Rhodes has directed his most venomous whisper campaign of all at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who fully shares with America's Sunni allies a desire to see the United States work to push back against Iran. It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that a few weeks after Biden trash-talked America's Sunni allies, a senior Obama administration official described Netanyahu as "a chickenshit."[14] At the same time, a second official bragged about the success of the United States in shielding the Islamic Republic from an attack by Israel.

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[12] David Samuels, "The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign Policy Guru," *New York Times Magazine*, May 5, 2016, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/magazine/the-aspiring-novelist-who-became-obamas-foreign-policy-guru.html?_r=0.

[13] Vice President Biden, "Remarks to Harvard University's Institute of Politics," October 2, 2014, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcKVCtg5dxM.

[14] Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Crisis in U.S.-Israel Relations is Officially Here," *The Atlantic*, October 28, 2014, available at: http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/10/the-crisis-in-us-israel-relations-is-officially-here/382031/.

"[U]ltimately [Netanyahu] couldn't bring himself to pull the trigger. It was a combination of our pressure and his own unwillingness to do anything dramatic. Now it's too late."[15]

Relations between Obama and Netanyahu are notoriously bad, but the administration's use of the echo chamber to demonize the Israeli prime minister is not really personal; it's business. Netanyahu's unusual popularity with the American electorate has forced the White House to impugn his credibility. The preferred mode of attack, however, is asymmetric—to focus as little as possible on the differences between the two men on Iran and to stress, instead, their disagreements over Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy. Rhodes and his echo chamber spin a tale casting Netanyahu as the villain of the Middle East peace process, an arch nationalist with unseemly ties to the right wing of the Republican Party who refuses to make the necessary compromises to bring about an historic reconciliation with the Palestinians.

Ironically, by leveling charges of chauvinism against the leadership of Israel and the Gulf Arab States simultaneously, Obama has helped to push them together. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel are, for example, better than ever before. Although some might say the president deserves credit for this dramatic improvement in Israeli-Arab relations, it is highly unlikely that he sees things that way, or will ever claim it.

Restoring Checks and Balances

The White House campaign in favor of the Iran deal, then, has been deceptive from the start. But does it rise to the level of a scandal, one that requires significant and sustained action by Congress? Before answering that question, a few observations are in order.

First, it is important to remember that we are not talking about a rogue operation. Ben Rhodes was not acting on his personal initiative; he was, clearly, carrying out the will of the president. So if any one individual is to be held responsible, it should be President Obama himself.

Second, there can be no doubt that messaging the public on foreign policy is a legitimate, indeed a vital, presidential function. And let's not be naïve: such messaging will always involve a significant degree of art. If we hold the president to the same standard of truth telling that we apply to friends and family in daily discourse, we are setting ourselves up for perpetual disappointment.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the White House messaging on Iran crosses the line between artful expression and full-blown deception. From the very beginning, circumventing Congress was a necessary element of Obama's Iran plan. In January 2014, one of Rhodes's meetings with progressive activists to convene a political campaign to sell the Iran deal leaked to the public. "This is healthcare for

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[15] Ibid.

us," Rhodes said in a surreptitious recording of the meeting. "We're already kind of thinking through, how do we structure a deal so we don't necessarily require legislative action right away? And," Rhodes continued, "there are ways to do that."[16]

As a result of this deception, even people who served at the highest levels of the Obama administration have begun to express doubts about the president's true intentions. When, for example, Samuels asked Panetta if he still believed that Obama had meant it when he said he would take whatever steps were necessary to stop Iran from attaining a nuclear weapon, Panetta responded, "Probably not."

Just as we have not fully understood what Obama was thinking, so we have also failed to understand the nature of the deal that he struck with the Iranians. The rhetoric out of Tehran and the actions of Secretary of State John Kerry now seem to suggest the existence of secret side deals about which we have heard nothing. Why is it, for example, that Secretary Kerry traveled to London last week to convince our allies to invest in Iran? No such obligation exists in the text of the JCPOA, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (which itself is a purposefully opaque document). And why do Iran's leaders claim that the JCPOA promised them greater economic gains than they have thus far received? Who is telling the truth—the Iranians or the Obama administration?

Given the organized obfuscation and the resulting lack of clarity, I believe that it behooves Congress to reopen an investigation into the many questions raised by the David Samuels article and other reports.

In addition, it also behooves Congress to clip the wings of the National Security Council. Rhodes's war room is not an isolated problem: it is symptomatic of an NSC that, according to all three of Obama's former secretaries of defense, has grown imperial in both size and ethos. In order to protect our system of checks and balances, Congress must take action to school the White House in a healthy respect for republican values.

With this idea in mind, some voices are calling for legislation that would subject the NSC to Congressional oversight. Personally, I do not favor this solution. As the head of a co-equal branch of government, the president has the right to organize his staff however he sees fit. Moreover, he deserves the frankest advice available, something his advisors will not provide if they are forced to serve two masters.

Therefore, the most elegant solution, it seems to me, is simply to cut the size of the NSC by limiting its budget and by putting tight restrictions on the number of detailees that it can borrow from other Departments and agencies. This idea is already making its way through the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. The more voices that support this effort, the better.

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[16] Matthew Continetti, "The Coming Détente with Iran," *The Washington Free Beacon*, October 31, 2014, available at: http://freebeacon.com/columns/the-coming-detente-with-iran/.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify. We all recognize that the challenges we face are complex, and that reasonable people can draw radically different conclusions from the same facts. However, it now seems more than obvious that, in this particular case, we still do not have all the facts we need in order even to have an honest disagreement. Vital American interests are at stake. I'm grateful to this Committee for delving deeply into the challenges we face and the alternative policies from which we must choose.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.
I will now recognize Mr. Hannah for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JOHN HANNAH

Mr. HANNAH. Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, members of the committee, on behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, thank you for the invitation to testify on the Iran nuclear deal.

For me as a foreign policy analyst, perhaps the most important revelation made in the recent New York Times profile of Ben Rhodes was its allegation concerning President Obama's overriding strategic purpose in seeking a nuclear deal with Iran, a purpose which until now has been largely concealed from the American people.

According to the article, "By eliminating the fuss about Iran's nuclear program, the administration hoped to eliminate a source of structural tension between the two countries, which would create the space for America to disentangle itself from its established system of alliances with countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, and Turkey. With one bold move, the administration would effectively begin the process of a large-scale disengagement from the Middle East."

Now, if accurate, this is truly a stunning admission with very big implications. As suggested elsewhere in the article, it does represent nothing less than a radical shift in American foreign policy. According to the article, Mr. Rhodes' passion for the Iranian nuclear deal did not derive from any investment in the technical details of sanctions or centrifuges or the future of Iranian politics but rather "from his own sense of urgency of radically reorienting American policy in the Middle East in order to make the prospects of any American involvement in the region's future wars a lot less likely."

Now, whether you agree or disagree with this inclination to step back from the leadership role that the United States has played in the Middle East since World War II, the troubling fact remains that this fundamental shift in American strategy has never been openly communicated to the American people. It has never been debated by the U.S. Congress and it has never been revealed to America's long-time allies in the Middle East.

Determining whether or not this very substantive claim is true, that is, whether the White House is now in reality seeking to engineer a large-scale American disengagement from the Middle East is a question of vital importance to U.S. national interests, again, whether you agree with it or disagree, and it's one that I think the Congress should seek clarification on.

If, in, fact the nuclear deal with Iran is as Mr. Rhodes suggests, the center of the arc for President Obama's efforts to radically transform U.S. policy, it raises a host of concerns. Certainly, it casts doubt on the administration's repeated claim that no deal was better than a bad deal. To the extent that the preeminent objective instead, in Mr. Rhodes' view, was to "eliminate the fuss about Iran's nuclear program" rather than to actually eliminate that program itself, one wonders whether the administration did demand

or had a tough enough posture in negotiations as it might otherwise have been.

Similar concerns, I think, exist now that the deal is in place and being implemented. When Congress was reviewing the JCPOA last summer, the administration made repeated assurances to the Congress that it would vigorously enforce the agreement while using every tool at its disposal to counter Iranian terrorism, its destabilizing regional activities, ballistic missile program, and human rights abuses.

Since then, however, Iran's bad behavior has dramatically escalated. It has significantly increased its combat role in Syria, it's increased—or it's arrested additional U.S. citizens, conducted multiple ballistic missile tests, it's fired rockets in very close proximity to U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf, held 10 American sailors captive, and threatened to close the Straits of Hormuz.

The U.S. response to these repeated provocations, despite the administration's earlier assurances, has so far ranged from quite tepid to nonexistent. Even more worrisome, perhaps, has been the reported U.S. willingness to at least contemplate granting Iran additional sanctions relief that it failed to negotiate in the JCPOA. Specifically, Iran is demanding access to dollarized financial transactions. This would be a huge unilateral concession that would greatly expand Iran's ability to do business internationally while legitimizing an Iranian banking sector that remains mired in elicit financing activities.

Let me close by stressing that especially in light of the questions raised by the New York Times profile about what America's true underlying purpose is in pursuing the Iran deal, it's extremely important that Congress now hold the administration's feet to the fire when it comes to the commitment to combat Iran's continued aggression. At a minimum, Congress should do everything in its power to ensure that Iran receives no new sanctions relief in the absence of significant new Iranian concessions. And far more aggressive use should be made of nonnuclear sanctions to constrain Iran's expanding ballistic missile program and deter the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps from their destabilizing activities in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

The bottom line is that the United States should not be sending Iran the message that we now place such a high premium on its continued adherence to the nuclear deal that it will have carte blanche to pursue its increasingly threatening policies in other areas that endanger our interests and those of our allies.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to testify. I know this is the place where I would normally say I look forward to your questions, but maybe more appropriately I stand by and am ready to try and answer your questions.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Hannah follows:]

Congressional Testimony

White House Narrative on the Iran Nuclear Deal

John Hannah
Senior Counselor
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Hearing before House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Washington, DC
May 17, 2016

FDD
FOUNDATION FOR
DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

John Hannah May 17, 2016

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For me, as a foreign policy analyst, perhaps the most important revelation made in the recent *New York Times Magazine* profile of Ben Rhodes[1] was its allegation concerning President Obama's overriding strategic purpose in seeking a nuclear deal with Iran – a purpose which, until now, has been largely concealed from the American people. According to the article:

> By eliminating the fuss about Iran's nuclear program, the administration hoped to eliminate a source of structural tension between the two countries, which would create the space for America to disentangle itself from its established system of alliances with countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel and Turkey. With one bold move, the administration would effectively begin the process of a large-scale disengagement from the Middle East.

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Whether you agree or disagree with this inclination to step back from the leadership role that the United States has played in the Middle East since World War II, the troubling fact remains that this fundamental shift in strategy has never been openly communicated to the American people. It has never been debated by the U.S. Congress. And it has never been revealed to long-time allies in the Middle East. Determining whether or not this claim is true – that is, whether the White House is now in reality seeking to engineer a large-scale disengagement from the Middle East – is a question of vital importance that the Congress should seek clarification on.

If, in fact, the nuclear deal with Iran is, as Mr. Rhodes suggests, "the center of the arc" for President Obama's efforts to radically transform U.S. policy, it raises a host of concerns. Certainly, it casts doubt on the administration's repeated claim that "No deal was better than a bad deal." To the extent that the preeminent objective was, in Mr. Rhodes' view, "to eliminate the fuss about Iran's nuclear program" rather than actually eliminate that program, one wonders whether the administration was as demanding in the negotiations as it might otherwise have been.

To take one example: If your goal is to make sure that Iran will never be able to develop nuclear weapons, sunset clauses, like those in the JCPOA that in 15 years allow Iran to produce as much fissile material as it wants, would probably be deemed unacceptable. If, on the other hand, your main interest was creating a decent interval that kicks the can down the road and gives you space to implement a broader strategy of disengagement, then a deal that promises to park the Iranian nuclear issue for a decade and a half might look very good.

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[1] David Samuels, "The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign-policy Guru," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 5, 2016. (http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/magazine/the-aspiring-novelist-who-became-obamas-foreign-policy-guru.html?_r=0)

Similar concerns exist now that the deal is in place. When Congress was reviewing the JCPOA last summer, the administration made repeated assurances that it would vigorously enforce the agreement while using every tool at its disposal to counter Iran's terrorism, destabilizing regional activities, ballistic missile program, and human rights abuses.

Since then, however, Iran's bad behavior has only escalated. It has significantly increased its combat role in Syria. It has arrested additional U.S. citizens. It has conducted multiple ballistic missile tests. It has fired rockets in close proximity to U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf, held 10 American sailors captive, and threatened to close the Straits of Hormuz.

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Let me close by stressing that, especially in light of the questions raised by the *New York Times* profile on Mr. Rhodes, it is extremely important that Congress now hold the administration's feet to the fire when it comes to its commitment to combat Iran's continued aggression. At a minimum, Congress should do everything in its power to ensure that Iran receives no new sanctions relief in the absence of significant new Iranian concessions. And far more aggressive use should be made of non-nuclear sanctions to constrain Iran's expanding ballistic missile program and deter the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps from their destabilizing activities in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. The bottom line is that the United States should not be sending Iran the message that we now place such a high premium on its continued adherence to the nuclear deal that it has carte blanche to pursue its increasingly threatening policies in other areas that endanger our interests.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I look forward to your questions.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Fair enough. I think that is a fair summary of where we are at.

I will now recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Mr. Rhodes I wish were here. He has a unique perspective. He said some truly amazing and over-the-top things that were quoted in the New York Times. I haven't heard anything refute that. One of the ones that I think would concern all of us is this quote that he said on the fourth page of this article. He says—it is printed out—"I don't know anymore where I begin and Obama ends." That is a true—if you really think and let that settle in, that is a truly stunning statement.

He also said some other things that I think are very concerning. "All these newspapers used to have foreign bureaus," which I think he makes a good point on that. And then he says, "now, they don't. They call us to explain to them what is happening in Moscow and Cairo. Most of the outlets are reporting of world events from Washington. The average reporter we talk to is 27 years old and their only reporting experience consists of being around political campaigns. That is a sea change. They literally know nothing."

He went on to say—Mr. Rhodes said, "But then there are these sorts of force multipliers. We have our compadres. I will reach out to a couple people and, you know, I wouldn't want to name them"—and then he goes on and—anyway, it is really interesting in his approach.

That is one component, but you compile that on top of what you also hear former Secretary Panetta said. This is what Secretary Panetta said. And this is a quote from Panetta. "And you know my view, talking with the President was—if I brought it to the point where we had evidence that they are developing an atomic weapon, I think the President is serious that he is not going to allow that to happen." But then Panetta stops according to the article, and the authors says, "But would you make that same assessment now?" And Secretary Panetta's quote is "I would make the same assessment now? Probably not." Probably not. So he said it once. I have repeated it twice, but this is of what is deep concern.

I think it would be naive to just gloss this over and say, hey, we got this deal, it is in the best interest of the United States, it is not something that was fully brought before the Congress. I would hope that we would walk out with an understanding from the three of you as what those big outstanding questions are.

But maybe somebody could shed some light on these so-called side deals, these things where Iran has maybe made other—do you have any insight, Mr. Doran, any of you, on what these so-called side deals might be?

Mr. DORAN. No. There's what we have uncovered, but as time goes on, as time goes on, we keep finding out more and more that wasn't in the text, and of course the Obama administration says there is nothing else. But the Iranians are saying that there is a larger deal in particular with regard to access to dollars and expanding their economy. And the behavior of our officials suggest that they are right. Our officials say that the Iranians are not correct, but here we have Secretary Kerry in Europe last week meeting with banks trying to get them to overlook concerns about Iran's illicit activities and to drum up business for Iran.

So there's a mismatch here between what we're saying and what we're doing, but what we're doing actually does match quite closely with what the Iranians are saying, and that's been a characteristic of the deal from day one. The deal has been shaped by the red lines of the supreme leader and not by the red lines of the President of the United States. So our red lines have dropped all along the way and the Iranians have stayed consistent with theirs.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Mr. Rubin?

Mr. RUBIN. Very quickly, the JCPOA is almost like a timeshare agreement where you sign the deal and then you'll only find out then what the true costs are. One of the subjects for oversight would be with regard to changing the language restricting Iran's ballistic missile work. Was it a deliberate concession or was it the result of incompetence?

What troubles me mostly is how we seem to be having become Iran's lawyer. For example, the Iranians will now complain that we are not enabling enough openings for their economy, and yet what didn't hit the Western press was last week the Iranians on the order of the supreme leader canceled an order, $20 million—I'm sorry, $2 million for Chevrolets. And the answer was we shouldn't be doing business with the Americans. Who's kneecapping the Iranian economy, us or the Iranians? It's time to have the Iranians stop blaming other people and take accountability to themselves.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you. My time is expired.

I now recognize the ranking member, Mr. Cummings.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hannah, you were Dick Cheney's top national security advisor, is that right?

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, sir, from 2005 to 2009.

Mr. CUMMINGS. And your office was ground zero in the Bush administration's marketing campaign to sell the Iraq War to the American people. Is that a fair statement?

Mr. HANNAH. No, I don't think it is. We—as you said, we played an important role in making the first draft of Secretary Powell's speech to the United Nations. That was certainly true ——

Mr. CUMMINGS. Okay.

Mr. HANNAH.—but we ——

Mr. CUMMINGS. So you were involved in making the first draft, is that right?

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, that's correct.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Is this pretty much the draft that he presented to the United Nations? I mean ——

Mr. HANNAH. It ——

Mr. CUMMINGS. I know a first draft usually goes through many more drafts but ——

Mr. HANNAH. Sure. Sure. It—I thought there were some similarities in it. If you actually hear some of Secretary Powell's people tell the story now, they say my draft was filled with inaccurate intelligence reports, reports that couldn't be supported by the intelligence community, so at the end of the day they threw out my draft. Secretary Powell then spent four days with the highest levels of our intelligence community at Langley doing a new draft that he said was primarily based on the intelligence community—community's NIE. So I—their claim is that there were no—that my draft

did not actually form the foundation of what he presented to the United Nations.

Mr. CUMMINGS. I am sure having heard that, I am sure you probably said then let me at least listen to what he did say, is that right? Did you read his ——

Mr. HANNAH. Oh, sure. No, I ——

Mr. CUMMINGS. Okay.

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, I did. Absolutely.

Mr. CUMMINGS. And was there any mention of weapons of mass destruction in your draft as compared to the final draft of Secretary Powell?

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, I think both of our drafts were entirely focused on weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. CUMMINGS. And what would you say was the difference because he seemed like he was very disappointed with the information that you had provided him and said that it was a blot on his reputation and pretty much said, you know, until the day he dies he is going to regret it. But I am just curious.

Mr. HANNAH. Just a correction, first of all, when he said it was a blot, I think he was talking about what he presented to the United Nations. I don't think he was talking about the draft that I presented him. It's what he did with George Tenet and the rest of the intelligence community that he ended up presenting that was obviously filled with errors. Most of it was wrong.

My draft—the instruction to me when I started that draft was that you need to go look at all of the intelligence there is, including raw intelligence, which we regularly got at the White House, which were individual reports by individual intelligence sources. I did that and put it into a draft, and then have the intelligence community look at that draft and decide what pieces of intelligence could they support, which ones weren't they able to support. That source was not reliable, didn't have enough of a reliable record of reporting, and they would throw it out. So I wrote the draft knowing that large segments of it would be thrown out because the intelligence community just didn't have the necessary confidence level in that reporting.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Now, let me read what Secretary Powell's chief of staff said about your document. I take it that is the first draft. He said, "Hannah was constantly flipping through his clipboard trying to source and verify all the statements. It was clear the thing was put together by cherry-picking everything." In fact, they discovered that you did not use a DIA report properly, you did not cite a CIA report fairly, and you referenced a New York Times article that quoted an intelligence report out of context.

So they scrapped, as you said, your entire document. And the Secretary's chief of staff described it in this way. He said, "Finally, I threw the paper down on the table and said this isn't going to cut it." Now, this was the chief of staff, right, for Secretary Powell. How could you have given him such a document that appears in his opinion to have been baseless and misleading?

Mr. HANNAH. Well, I mean, there's a long history to this. It was Mr. Wilkerson, Colonel Wilkerson ——

Mr. CUMMINGS. Yes, I ——

Mr. HANNAH.—who was his chief of staff.

Mr. CUMMINGS. That is correct.

Mr. HANNAH. He has a long record of—that anybody can go read about his views of the Iraq War and his regrets and deep regrets. I think we just have a different view of the draft I presented.

I do acknowledge that it included an awful lot of stuff that I knew that came from the intelligence community that they would not be able to support. If they thought it wasn't used properly, they could use it properly if they thought it was useful. So we just have a basic, I think, difference of view about what I actually provided and what the purpose of my draft was. It wasn't meant to be a final draft, the final word that would go to the United Nations. It was meant to be a rough draft that the intelligence community would go through with a fine-tooth comb and pick out those parts that they thought were the—made the strongest case that in fact Saddam did have weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. CUMMINGS. But it wasn't just Mr. Wilkerson. It was also George Tenet who reportedly turned directly to you—and I am sure you will remember this—and said "you wasted a lot of our time." Is that true, and did he say that, George Tenet?

Mr. HANNAH. He certainly didn't say it to me. He may have—certainly, I can easily see him saying that kind of thing, but he didn't say it to me.

Mr. CUMMINGS. All right. Thank you very much.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I now recognize the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. Walberg, for 5 minutes.

Mr. WALBERG. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the panel for being here. We wish that there were other members of course.

Mr. Doran, in your testimony you discuss the need to restore checks and balances and note that while Mr. Rhodes' behavior is scandalous, and I think propaganda is a word that you used, it wasn't a rogue operation but that he was carrying out the will of the President. Questions that I am sure my constituents representing them here in the people's House would want me to ask in reference to this is, number one, how can Congress take steps to prevent this President and future Presidents from circumventing Congress?

Mr. DORAN. I think this is part of the inherent tension in our government. I did say that I think that the—Mr. Rhodes is doing the bidding of the President. I think it's important to remember that. We have now numerous accounts from—mainly from former Defense Secretaries Panetta and Gates especially, showing how there's an inner core in the White House of five or six people who consult closely with the President about his views, and everybody else is pretty much left out of the conversation, including principals on the National Security Council. And Mr. Rhodes is part of that inner circle.

The only answer I have to this—I spent a lot of time thinking about it. The only answer I have are the two that I gave you. One is over—just exercising the oversight responsibilities that Congress has, asking the hard questions, and continuing to put pressure on the executive branch to come clean.

The second is, I think, cutting back the size of the NSC. It's simply wrong. I think anyone on both sides of the aisle would see that the National Security Council, created by statute in 1947, was cre-

ated to be a coordinating body, not an operational arm of the government. And under President Obama, it has slipped into becoming an operational arm.

And I think when you look at the war room, as described not by me but by Mr. Rhodes, this is an operational White House.

Just one last point here, there's an issue here that I think there's—we all just need to be aware of, but there's not much we can do about it, and that is the collapse of the press. So one of the reasons why this is a threat to our checks and balances is because of the collapse of, I would say, certain informal checks on governmental power that have disappeared over the last decade, you know, very, very quickly because of the rise of the internet.

What Ben Rhodes said in that article about foreign events being reported from Washington and from the White House by young reporters who don't know anything and don't have any other sources of information except what the White House is telling them is completely correct, and it's a danger. There's not much in terms of legislation that we can do about that, but we need to be aware of it.

It's sort of a double danger because not only do those reporters not have alternative sources of information, but because all of the information is coming out of the White House, they have a special interest in maintaining good relations with the White House, and reporting the news stories as the White House wants it reported.

Mr. WALBERG. Well, let me go on from that as well, and, Mr. Rubin, you may want to jump in here as well. Ben Rhodes' assistant in the article—in his report—his comments in the New York Times Magazine article indicated that there were compadres involved in this, and some of those were in the think tank community as well. Who would he be referring to in a think tank and policy world?

Mr. RUBIN. The Ploughshares Fund.

Mr. WALBERG. The what?

Mr. RUBIN. The Ploughshares Fund has funded many of the elements of the so-called echo chamber, to use Ben Rhodes' words, supposedly neutral assessors, for example, in various arms control think tanks, perhaps in the Atlantic Council as well and elsewhere were receiving grants. Now, one can say just because one has received a grant from this high-level funder—and by the way, this funder also had provided grants to senior Iranian officials working in the United States as well at universities and so forth—just because they have funded doesn't necessarily mean that there's a quid pro quo, but what you will find is that anyone who has received Ploughshares funding, especially for the bulk of their grant or the bulk of their salary, never, not once contradicted the assessment which Ben Rhodes sought to put forward.

Mr. WALBERG. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.

I will now recognize the gentlewoman from New York, Mrs. Maloney, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you.

After a good deal of deliberation and research, I voted against the Iran nuclear deal. And at the time I was hoping very much that I was wrong, but everything that has happened since and the

additional information that has come forward, it literally has convinced me that I made the right decision.

But I have to say as a Member who took the time to carefully study the plan before making a decision, as I believe all of my colleagues did, I had absolute, complete access to all documents. I read every document, even classified documents. Every meeting was addressed in various areas. The administration bent over backwards to provide accurate information to us.

And I must say that this was one of the most hotly debated issues that I have experienced since I have been in Congress, but both sides were deeply involved in putting forward their cases. There were demonstrations, there were petitions, there were meetings, there were conferences, there were debates. It was completely and totally open to everyone to learn and to make their own decision.

So my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are now taking another opportunity to attack the administration with a futile fishing expedition based on a widely questioned New York Times profile of an advisor to President Obama. I believe it is quite a stretch to suggest that the White House building a comprehensive information campaign to support a major foreign policy initiative amounts to any way misleading the American people.

And I find it incredibly hypocritical to invite Mr. Hannah, who worked for Dick Cheney and helped market the Iraq War based on false pretenses to come now before us as an expert witness on an alleged false White House narrative. I find the hypocrisy really beyond belief.

And I would like to ask Mr. Hannah, do you know who Scott McClellan is? Yes or no.

Mr. HANNAH. Yes.

Mrs. MALONEY. Yes. Well, Scott ——

Mr. HANNAH. Yes.

Mrs. MALONEY. Other people may not know, but he was the White House press secretary, and he wrote a book about his experience. He explained how a small group of advisors called the White House Iraq working group helped sell the Iraq War by misleading the American people.

And I am quoting from President Bush's press secretary. He said, "The White House Iraq group had been set up in the summer of 2002 to coordinate the marketing of the war to the public." And, Mr. Hannah, wasn't Scooter Libby your boss and Dick Cheney's chief of staff? Weren't they part of the Iraq group?

Mr. HANNAH. The Vice President wasn't. I think Scooter Libby was. I'm not 100 percent sure, but I think you're right.

Mrs. MALONEY. Yes. Yes. Well, Scott McClellan further wrote, he explained exactly how you and others misled the American people. And he said this, "As the campaign accelerated, qualifications were downplayed or dropped altogether. Contradictory intelligence was largely ignored or simply disregarded."

So, Mr. Hannah, why did you ignore and disregard evidence that contradicted your political narrative for the war?

Mr. HANNAH. Congresswoman, I would just say that, you know, to the extent that I got it wrong in believing that Saddam had

weapons of mass destruction, an awful lot of people got it wrong. It was not a figment of the imagination ——

Mrs. MALONEY. Sir, are you saying ——

Mr. HANNAH.—of the Vice President's office.

Mrs. MALONEY.—that Mr. McClellan was wrong in the book when he said he misled and lied to the American people, this group?

Mr. HANNAH. All I can tell you is that there have been bipartisan commissions that have looked at how—the intelligence on weapons of mass destruction ——

Mrs. MALONEY. Do you think ——

Mr. HANNAH.—that came to the conclusion that the President of the United States did not lie about ——

Mrs. MALONEY. I am not talking about him ——

Mr. HANNAH.—evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

Mrs. MALONEY.—I am talking about McClellan. Was McClellan wrong? Was he misinformed? Was he lying ——

Mr. HANNAH. I may have had one ——

Mrs. MALONEY.—when he wrote we were misleading the American people. We downplayed any ——

Mr. HANNAH. I ——

Mrs. MALONEY.—contradictory information?

Mr. HANNAH. I—Congresswoman, I haven't read his book. All I can tell you is that a lot of people who know Scott very well—I don't know Scott at all really ——

Mrs. MALONEY. Okay. Are you saying ——

Mr. HANNAH.—have contradicted his presentation.

Mrs. MALONEY. Okay.

Mr. HANNAH. They believe he was wrong in his judgments and he ——

Mrs. MALONEY. Are you saying that you did include contradictory intelligence showing that your case was weak or nonexistent?

Mr. HANNAH. No. I think we were instructed to write what we thought was the best case for why Saddam had weapons of mass destruction.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The gentlewoman's time is expired.

Mrs. MALONEY. No, I have 21 seconds left according to this.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. No, your—that is ——

Mrs. MALONEY. So I would just like to ——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. No, no, no, no, you are 27 seconds over time.

Mrs. MALONEY. Oh, okay.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you.

Mrs. MALONEY. All right.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I now recognize the ——

Mrs. MALONEY. Well, I would like to put my closing statement in the record. It is a zinger, and it is very hypocritical, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. No, no—you know, Mr. Hannah is here to answer questions. Mr. Rhodes is not here to answer questions. That is what is difficult about this hearing.

We will go to Mr. Gosar now of Arizona. I recognize him for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Rubin, Mr. Doran, and Mr. Hannah, thank you for your testimony and for providing valuable information to this committee, which sheds light on the deceptive manner in which the Obama administration sold out the American people and our allies across the globe with the Iran capitulation agreement.

Even when presented with the facts like the facts each of you have laid out in your testimony, the administration box doubles down and tries to discredit anyone who disagrees with their false narrative, including me. When asked about Ben Rhodes' revelatory interview with the New York Times Magazine, Press Secretary Josh Earnest dodged and decided to lambaste several Members of Congress, including me, as liars, truly eliciting Alinsky's principles to their core.

Why? Because I said that under this illegal Iran deal and lifting sanctions that Iran would be able to access up to $100 billion that was previously frozen. His Treasury Secretary Jack Lew stated the sanctions relief would be worth about $100 billion. The President of Iran said his country would get $100 billion.

Despite the fact that I said something similar in September of 2015, the White House is now trying to brand me as a liar in attempting to deflect Ben Rhodes' recent statements. The point is not whether it is $100 billion or $50 billion or whether it is all at once or over a period of time.

The real problem is that President Obama is funding the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism. Iran is no friend to the United States, to Christians, to Jews, or even Sunni Muslims. Iran is a rogue nation hell-bent on nuclear war in the Middle East.

A responsible President who loves his country and supports our allies would never lift sanctions and give this murderous regime money, much less billions. This deal is a strain on our national character. Our next President we can only hope will terminate this nonsense and promote freedom, accountability, and opportunity overseas, not a regime that stones women, hangs homosexuals, and kills members of other religions and political beliefs.

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest suggested I show up to the Oversight Committee. Well, here I am. Where is Ben Rhodes? I guess you can run and hide.

Now, Mr. Doran, much of the news coverage recently had focused on Mr. Rhodes and the lies and misinformation that he had spun relating to the Iran deal. However, we know that no one operates in a vacuum. Does Mr. Rhodes represent a rogue employee of the White House or does this spin campaign represent something more deeply about how the White House handled the Iran deal?

Mr. DORAN. I believe it represents the President's strategic vision and the President's will. He—the President is on record as early as 2006 saying that he wanted to improve relations with Iran and Syria and that he saw Iran and Syria as sharing core interests and stabilizing Iraq and that we should work with them to do that.

I don't think he ever lost that. I think ——

Mr. GOSAR. So you would say that he actually is ultimately responsible for developing this frame of capitulation?

Mr. DORAN. Absolutely. And it's the—that's the key factor to understand why we made all of these concessions to Iran because

we're not actually trying to stop it from getting a nuclear weapon. We're trying to develop a partnership with it.

Mr. GOSAR. Yes. Unfortunately, as you said, the lies and misrepresentation that are deeply woven deep within the Iran capitulation agreement are just the latest example of a culture of deception that has been this administration's MO since its inception. Let's not forget that this is the same administration that sold the American people out to the insurance companies under the guise of health care reform. The President's congressional minions drove a legislative garbage truck full of special interest giveaways through Congress and over Americans' pocketbooks by knowingly and willfully repeating the lie, "If you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor."

This is the same administration that blatantly violated Federal law by engaging in unlawful lobbying in order to promote its Waters of the United States regulation. The Government Accountability Office confirmed that the executive branch, under the direction of EPA Administrator McCarthy, unleashed an illegal propaganda campaign in order to force WOTUS down the throats of the American people.

Mr. Rubin, it is clear that the Obama administration had a covert agenda to reach a deal with Iran at any cost that was driven more by the optics of diplomacy and legacy than the real facts on the ground. What are the dangers of such a narrative-driven approach to policy-making?

Mr. RUBIN. When one calibrates policy to a fantasy that is constructed rather than to reality, the cost is often paid with blood. Iran has not become any less of a terror sponsor as a result of the JCPOA. In fact, if we take the—if we just take the $50 billion figure, that's 10 times the annual official budget of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

One thing I would do, sir, productively, is take the ability of the State Department, take the ability to designate state sponsors of terrorism out of the hands of the State Department and put it in an independent commission so it doesn't become a political football.

Mr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. And this behavior has become the status quo for an Obama administration that has blatantly disregarded the rule of law and the respect for the American people to enact its partisan agenda. It is a dangerous precedent and it needs to be stopped by Congress.

Thank you, Chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The gentleman's time is expired.

I will now recognize the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia, Ms. Norton, for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Now, we can re-litigate the Iran deal as much of the testimony attempted to do or we can discuss the central allegation that brought us to this hearing. It is of course—and that is what I would like to pursue, that essentially Republicans, my colleagues accuse Ben Rhodes of misleading the American people by claiming that the Obama administration began negotiating the deal, and the operative year is 2013 after Iran elected a so-called moderate president. The claim is that if the American people knew that the Presi-

dent was working towards the agreement before 2013, they would have rejected the deal.

So here is how the claim is worded in the New York Times Magazine, that Rhodes "shaped the story" of the Iran deal, that the Iran deal began in 2013 when a moderate faction within the Iranian regime beat the hardliners, leading to an election where there was "more openness."

So the author says that Mr. Rhodes claimed the story began in 2013. That is what brought us here, gentlemen. But the problem is that isn't true. The President's efforts with respect to Iran were widely reported from the time he became President, so I am going to ask that a clip from the Washington Post 2008 when the President became President be posted. It describes how the Iranian President wrote to President Obama after he was elected in 2008.

Now, you are all a panel of so-called experts. I assume you read the Washington Post on occasion. Were you not aware of this 2008 report? Were any of you unaware of that 2008 report?

Mr. HANNAH. I don't remember the report exactly, Congresswoman, but I think you're exactly right that in fact everybody knew going into that election that President Obama had made clear that he thought he would be the one to end our three-decade-old war ——

Ms. NORTON. But this is about ——

Mr. HANNAH.—with the Islamic Republic.

Ms. NORTON.—negotiating the agreement itself and about being in touch with the Iranian regime before there was a regime change.

Let's go to the Washington Times in 2009. I assume you read the Washington Times. It describes how President Obama sent two letters to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Now, that is 2009. This is well before 2013. There are many reports from every year of the administration. This is why this hearing befuddles me.

Two thousand ten from The Economist, Mr. Obama says the various components of his policy should not be seen in insolation. First, he tried to engage Iran early and directly not because he was naive about the regime but in order to make clear to the world that America was not the aggressor and he was willing to work with Iran if it behaved reasonably.

Two thousand eleven from The Atlantic, "On three occasions in as many years U.S. diplomats have sat down"—this is 2011—"with high-level Iranian officials to discuss confidence-building measures as part of a six-party body negotiating issue."

Two thousand twelve—all of this is before 2013—United States and Iran have agreed in principle for the first time to one-on-one negotiations from Iran's nuclear program. Now, you are supposed to be experts. Some other experts not invited here have said that it is nonsense that only after regime change did the President begin to negotiate.

Joe Cirincione, the president of Ploughshares Fund, called it utter nonsense. Suzanne Maloney of the Brookings Institution agreed, and she explained the core claims of official deception around the Iran deal were never actually substantiated.

Now, none of these experts, so that we could have some balanced picture, were called here. Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, by not inviting these experts, we are getting a very one-sided story ——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. NORTON. I will yield to the chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Democrats always, always have an opportunity to invite a witness to come to this hearing. Democrats chose not to invite a witness to this hearing. And the person we called from the White House, Mr. Rhodes, also refused to show up.

Ms. NORTON. I understand, Mr. Chairman, and the ranking member has already indicated that had there been time ——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I am just responding to your ——

Ms. NORTON. That had there been time, there would have been a Democratic witness. I thank you very much, and I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I will now recognize the gentleman from Ohio, Mr. Jordan, for 5 minutes.

Mr. JORDAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, are any of you familiar with the name Jonathan Gruber? Mr. Doran, do you know Jonathan Gruber? Do you know that name?

Mr. DORAN. It rings a bell, but I can't call it up.

Mr. JORDAN. Anyone, Mr. Rubin, do you know Mr. Gruber?

Mr. RUBIN. I know the name.

Mr. JORDAN. You know the name? Do you know what he does for—you know, what his occupation is?

Mr. HANNAH. I think he's an economist who was enlisted to help with the health care reform. Yes, sir. Yes.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes, the famous guy who was—and do you know what title he was given when he was helping with ObamaCare and health care reform? Do you know what he was titled, anyone remember? Architect of ObamaCare. And you know, that is one thing, you are the architect of ObamaCare and all, but he got a little notoriety in the press and actually had to come and sit right where you guys are sitting a few years ago. Any of you guys know why he was brought in front of the committee and had to sit here? Anyone want to take a guess? Mr. Rubin?

Mr. RUBIN. Well, basically he lied about the cost of ObamaCare.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes. He was deceptive, right? He said things like this. He talked about the stupidity of the American voter. He talked about—this is a direct quote. He was out bragging after this thing is passed, "Lack of transparency is a political advantage." That is a nice way of saying if you deceive people, you might get your way, right? It might help your case.

So here is Jonathan Gruber, architect of ObamaCare, talking about deception, things like if you like your plan, you can keep it, like your doctor, you can keep it, premiums are going to go down, Web site is going to work, Web site is safe, emergency room—everything turned out to be false.

And now, we hear about another person in the Obama administration, Mr. Rhodes. He comes along and he is given the title, according to the piece in the New York Times, "the single most influential voice shaping American foreign policy." Wow, things are starting to sound familiar. And he creates a false narrative as well, talks about this echo chamber and deceiving the press. And his derision for the press is kind of like Mr. Gruber's derision for the American voter because he says something like—what is the line

he used there—"they literally know nothing" was one of the lines that I think Mr. Rhodes used in his piece.

Mr. Rubin, you talked about this false choice, I think, in your opening statement that Mr. Rhodes set up and used this echo chamber of folks who "literally know nothing" to further this message to the American people, this binary choice, either it is the deal or it is war. That is what he set up, right?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes.

Mr. JORDAN. And the thing that strikes me, Mr. Chairman—and I won't take my full time here. I just wanted to make this point. So this isn't the first time this administration, on some big policy decision, has deceived the American people. But maybe more importantly, it is not in my judgment the first time Mr. Rhodes, on a big policy issue, on a big concern to the American people, has tried to deceive them.

And, Mr. Rubin, you are getting ready to say something. Go ahead.

Mr. RUBIN. Well, I mean, the deception comes oftentimes in the way of cherry-picking. If we want to look at previous Iranian offers or acknowledgements of letters, for example, what's actually interesting is when Supreme Leader Khomeini, on the 30th anniversary of the seizure of the American embassy, a seizure for which no Iranian reformist or hardliner has ever apologized, mocked President Obama for the letters he was sending and said we are not going to talk to the Americans until they fundamentally change their position.

And so one of the reasons why we need this transparency, this transparency about what you're saying, is sometime around 2012 the Americans fundamentally changed their position but didn't come clean to the American people about it.

Mr. JORDAN. Yes, I thank you for that.

Let me just finish up with this, then, just to, I think, make this point. Mr. Gruber deceives the American people on ObamaCare, along comes Mr. Rhodes on the Iranian deal, uses deception to create this false choice and help get this agreement passed. And as I said, this is not the first time Mr. Rhodes has done. It is not the first time the administration has done, more importantly, not the first time Mr. Rhodes has done it. I think he did it on the Benghazi issue. I think he did it there as well when he said in the now-famous talking points, which frankly became the catalyst for the formation—the reason the House of Representatives and the Speaker formed the committee when he created this false choice between—it is not a failure of policy; it is rooted in a video, and straight from the talking points.

And so, again, the pattern with the administration, what appears to be a pattern with Mr. Rhodes himself, and then when he is given the ask to come testify doesn't even have the courtesy to show up.

So, Mr. Chairman, I yield back my 4 seconds.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.

I will now recognize the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Lynch, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the panel.

I can't let this go. Earlier, Mr. Doran said that if only the President had been up front about withdrawing from the Middle East. I have to say that, you know, the President was clearly—during his campaign going back to 2007, 2008, I mean ad nauseam. At the time that the President took office, we had about 165,000 troops and 180,000 contractors in Iraq, and he went on and on about the fact that he was going to get those people out of there, that he was going to withdraw from the Middle East. I think he got elected based on that claim.

But he was like Trump does with we are going to build the wall, we are going to make America great again, President Obama, during his campaign, he went on and on. He hammered away at that and said if I get elected, I am going to withdraw those troops. I am going to get—in the first 16 months—I went back and read it—he said in the first 16 months he is going to get all the combat brigades out of Iraq. So he was very much up front about that. He was perfectly clear on that.

The other fiction here is that the American people were tricked by Ben Rhodes. And remember, we were the audience, us here. They were trying to get the bill, the Iran agreement through Congress. So we are the ones getting all the information. And I have to say I was never tricked by Ben Rhodes. And with all due respect to Ben Rhodes, in terms of the merits of that agreement, he was probably not as qualified as a lot of the other people that were coming to Congress and testifying before both, you know, Republican and Democratic caucuses.

We had a list of experts. It is very lengthy, but I will just hit on a few. We had 78 nuclear nonproliferation experts, 60 national security experts, 5 former ambassadors to Israel, 29 Nobel Prize-winning scientists, 36 retired generals, over 100 former U.S. ambassadors, and over 500 Iranian-Americans with experience both in the U.S. and Iran, 340 rabbis, 53 Christian leaders. These scientists included physicists who helped design the first hydrogen bomb.

So we had stone-cold experts on this. We were not listening to Ben Rhodes. And those are the people that—and I actually sat with one of the experts from the IAEA about what he thought after having been in Iran and at some of their—at ARAK, at Fordow, at Natanz and what they actually thought about the ability of this agreement to stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. So those are the people that we also listened to. It wasn't Ben Rhodes and, you know, some political spin.

But I would say that if we are really trying to measure this agreement—and that seems what is going on here; we are all rehashing this agreement again—I think the best way would be to go to the IAEA because under the agreement they are the ones that we have put on the ground and asked them to do these inspections.

And so I would just like to—for the record, I am going to ask have admitted the first two reports, January and February, by the IAEA, the international agency, verification for monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231. So this is an inspection done by the IAEA because of the agreement.

And some of the things—I will just tell you what they report. I will just give you the greatest hits. They determined that ARAK—they went into A–R-A–K—everybody things I'm saying Iraq—but ARAK heavy water research reactor and they determined that Iran was not pursuing the construction of the existing IR–40 reactor.

They had removed the existing calandria from that reactor, and they had rendered the calandria inoperable by filling it with concrete, which is part of the agreement. They had stored under continuous conditions—continuous agency monitoring all existing natural uranium pellets and fuel pursuant to the agreement. They modified the fuel process line at the fuel manufacturing plant at Isfahan so that it cannot be used for the fabrication of fuel. Iran was not accumulating enriched uranium through its enrichment research and development activities.

Let's see. It goes on. I got 27 seconds left. A lot of good stuff in here. And these are people who have actually been in Iran doing the inspections. Iran at Fordow was not conducting any uranium enrichment, had removed all of its nuclear material at Fordow. This was all pursuant to the agreement.

And I am getting to 8 seconds. Had completed the modalities and facility inspection arrangements to allow the agency to implement all the transparency measures provided in the agreement.

So that is what the IAEA is exactly doing, and, you know, that is part of the agreement. That is what we put them for.

The great advantage to us no matter what happens in the future is that up to the time that this agreement was signed we never had people on the ground in those facilities. We were always guessing about the level of progress they had made on their nuclear weapons program. Now, we have people on the ground.

So even if they breach, we will have had the benefit of having people on the ground looking at those facilities, and for military purpose or diplomatic purposes, that is a good thing.

I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman, and we will enter those into the record unless there is an objection.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. No objection, so ordered.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I now recognize the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Gowdy.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you for not only the panel that is before us but the panel you tried to have before us. Not only did Ben Rhodes not appear and cost us an opportunity to question Mr. Rhodes, it cost us the opportunity and the privilege to ask questions of our friend and colleague Tommy Cotton. Speaking of constitutional crisis, hauling a United States Senator before a committee of Congress would really have created a constitutional crisis, so good thing for us Tommy was willing to come on his own.

And the background contrast would have been interesting to me. You know, the White House is very critical of Senator Cotton and has been for several months now. Senator Cotton, of course, when he was serving tours of duty in the United States Army in Afghanistan and Iraq, Ben Rhodes was navigating the mean streets of a creative writing curriculum. And I mean that literally. That is not

figurative. He has a master's in creative writing. And if you are interested in writing haikus and sonnets and novellas, he is probably the right guy.

On the other hand, if you are advising the leader of the free world on foreign policy matters, I don't know how a haiku helps. But I would have enjoyed the opportunity to ask Mr. Rhodes how his background prepared him to sell the Iranian deal, but yet Tommy Cotton's background did not prepare him to criticize the Iranian deal. That would have been an interesting dichotomy for me.

But what I really wanted to do, Mr. Chairman, was ask Mr. Rhodes to help me, as Gruber did in the past, understand what he meant by certain things. Mr. Chairman, he said "we created an echo chamber." Does the chairman know who "we" is?

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I do not.

Mr. GOWDY. Well, certainly he couldn't be referring to other presidential advisors because he then invoked executive privilege and he can't be talking about what other presidential advisors said. So it couldn't be that, could it? I don't ——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I do not know.

Mr. GOWDY. Okay. Well, then he said, "Reporters call us to explain to them what is happening in Moscow and Cairo." And I am curious which reporters that would be. Which ones call him to find out what is going on in Cairo? But we can't ask him because he is not here.

And I would add he has plenty of time to sit down for what he had hoped to be a fluff piece in the New York Times. He has been on television plenty of times. He had plenty of time to draft memos for the President, but he doesn't have time to come before a committee of Congress.

And then this is what really concerns me, Mr. Chairman. In talking about those reporters, he said "they literally know nothing." How does someone literally know nothing? He said they were 27 years old, which suggests that they probably have a driver's license at that point. You have to know something to get a driver's license. If they are 27, they would be eligible to vote in the Democrat primary more than likely, so you have to know something. So when you say they literally know nothing, that struck me. I wanted to ask him about that.

Also, I think that his appearance today, had he bothered to come, would have created an opportunity for a little bit of bipartisanship, which I know our friends on the other side of the aisle like from time to time. It said he expressed contempt for the editors and reporters at the New York Times, the Washington Post, and The New Yorker. That might have provided an opportunity for some bipartisanship. It would have given us an opportunity to share our own frustrations. But he didn't come.

Mr. Chairman, you do a great job leading this committee. It is up to you whether or not you assert the people's right to question Ben Rhodes, but this selective use of executive privilege on one day but it is not executive privilege on the next, at some point Congress is going to have to stick up for itself. We are going to have to decide whether or not we do have a right to question people. And if you have time to make these comments to a reporter, you ought to

be able to come explain yourself. And if you have time at the White House to send a bunch of mean tweets about a guy who served two tours, two combat tours in Tommy Cotton and he is willing to come, but the creative writing expert isn't willing to come, at some point this body is going to have to stick up for itself.

With that, I would yield back to the chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.

I will now recognize the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Connolly, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And lordy, lordy, the outrage of my friend from South Carolina does a heart good, does a heart good.

From my point of view, this hearing is nothing but a smokescreen, yet another in a long chain of attempts by my friends on the other side of the aisle to deny what is manifestly true, that the Iran nuclear agreement is working. It is not a panacea for all Iranian behavior, though they would like you to believe that, just as disarmament agreements with the Soviet Union, our implacable foe during the cold war, were also not designed to address every aspect of Soviet behavior, would that they could, but they are not designed to be the be-all and end-all to circumscribe an entire relationship. But they were designed and this was designed for a specific set of goals.

And Lord Almighty, we had a hearing in the House Foreign Affairs Committee where again my friends on the other side of the aisle desperately wanted not to talk about compliance, but being the skunk at the picnic, I did. And let me see. In terms of compliance, we found that the agreement has reduced the number of centrifuges, as planned, from 19,000 to 6,104, that the fuel enrichment plants at Natanz and Fordow saw those centrifuges reduced. Iran is no longer enriching uranium above 3.67 percent, verified by the IAEA, as my friend Mr. Lynch indicated, and has reduced its stockpile of enriched uranium, as required, to no more than 300 kilograms shipped out of the country, verified. Centrifuge production in uranium mines and mills under constant surveillance and verified, and of course the plutonium production capability eliminated.

I asked point blank is there any evidence of cheating because that is all we heard. They were going to cheat, they couldn't be trusted, and this was nothing but enabling behavior to allow Iran to become a nuclear threshold state, and the answer was no, so far, no cheating.

Now, my friend from South Carolina—we are friends; we are sometimes sparring partners—just is all exorcised about the fact that somebody, God knoweth why, would not accept a friendly invitation to come before this committee because we are a very hospitable environment to witnesses. And once in a while we deny them their Fifth Amendment rights, once in a while we badger them, once in a while we call them names, once in a while we censor them, a lot of times we interrupt them when we don't like their testimony, but they ought to come here nonetheless.

You are lucky, Mr. Rubin. You are really lucky to be here today.

Mr. Hannah, when you received an invitation from the Senate Intelligence Committee in 2006, did you accept that invitation?

Mr. HANNAH. I don't remember getting an invitation.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, actually, it is in the committee report. Did you not see that report?

Mr. HANNAH. I must ——

Mr. CONNOLLY. They published a report.

Mr. HANNAH.—not have.

Mr. CONNOLLY. What?

Mr. HANNAH. I must not have.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well ——

Mr. HANNAH. I don't recall.

Mr. CONNOLLY.—let me help refresh your memory because they issued a final report, and they said that every request made to you for an interview was denied. And it concludes, "These decisions inhibited the committee's ability to pursue legitimate lines of inquiry." Any reason why you would say no to the Senate Intelligence Committee when it was under Democratic—actually, it wasn't under Democratic control in 2006, but you still said no. And that doesn't refresh your memory?

Mr. HANNAH. It doesn't refresh it, but I can tell you that there was obviously—especially in the office of the Vice President—counsel there was a very aggressive proponent of executive ——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Go ahead. Say it.

Mr. HANNAH. You say it for me.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Was that word coming out?

Mr. HANNAH. Executive privilege.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Privilege, there you go. So for a Republican White House, it is perfectly okay, and you had a very aggressive counsel saying you are not going, but here, with somebody who gives a profile for a magazine where he boasts about himself, we have got to haul him in chains before this committee because we are being denied access, and that is wrong. And you have agreed to testify about it, knowing that. So do you think Mr. Rhodes should be here in a way that you were not 10 years ago?

Mr. HANNAH. In our administration what I remember is that Dr. Rice, when she was in her capacity as NSC advisor, actually did testify. So I think there ——

Mr. CONNOLLY. I am talking about you, Mr. Hannah. You were named by the Senate Intelligence Committee by name and singled out for your refusal to make yourself available to that committee when it was doing its work. Was there less gravity to the issue at hand 10 years ago involving you than there is today involving Mr. Rhodes?

Mr. HANNAH. Issues were very grave in both cases, I think. I think Mr. Rhodes actually is a more influential player than I am ——

Mr. CONNOLLY. All right.

Mr. HANNAH.—and he's been willing to talk about all of these issues ——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well ——

Mr. HANNAH.—so openly and with such contempt for so many people ——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well ——

Mr. HANNAH.—that ——

Mr. CONNOLLY.—we are glad to have you here ——

Mr. HANNAH.—I think he's in a different ——
Mr. CONNOLLY.—today talking as well.
Mr. HANNAH.—situation.
Mr. CONNOLLY. I am sure my colleagues 10 years ago ——
Mr. HICE. [Presiding] The gentleman's time is expired.
Mr. CONNOLLY.—would have enjoyed having you.
One good aggressive White House counsel deserves another, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.
Mr. HICE. The gentleman's time is expired.
The chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida, Mr. DeSantis, for 5 minutes.
Mr. DESANTIS. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.
I would think that Ben Rhodes would be falling all over himself to come here. I mean, he seems to think he is so much smarter than everybody. Well, educate everybody. Tell us why those of us who oppose this were wrong. Show us what we are missing. Educate the American people. I think it would have been a great opportunity for him if, in, fact he is as smart and worldly as he says.
And I think part of this, yes, there is deception involved, and any time a major policy is sold to the Congress or the public, that is a major, major thing. Rhodes himself said that the Iran deal was going to be the ObamaCare of the second term.
And of course with ObamaCare in the first term, the President famously said over and over again, if you like your plan, you can keep it, if you like your plan, you can keep it. Not only was that not true, the administration knew at the time it would not be true, and yet they did it in order to engineer passage of ObamaCare.
And then with this deal, the President was in the presidential debate in 2012. He said the deal is very simple that I will accept. They end their nuclear program. It is pretty straightforward, he says. And of course what we see now is Iran retains really a major, major nuclear program. I believe they are on a path to a bomb at worst once the time the 8, the 15 years goes up.
So there is a lot, I think, that is important about that, and it important to talk about it. But I also think that some of what we are talking about with Rhodes, for example, the idea that, well, Rouhani's election really changes everything because this guy is a moderate, never mind that he would never have been allowed to run by the Ayatollah if he truly wanted to change the nature of the regime. So you have a regime that is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. You have a regime which, you know, people fail to mention that they were responsible for as many as 1,500 American deaths in Iraq. They were leading the Qods Force, Soleimani, they were funding these massive EFP bombs, which took out at least hundreds of our soldiers and probably as many as 1,500.
So that is the nature of the regime. And the notion that was propagated, and Rhodes is honest about it, he says, look, this is an opening, it is a new—we have got to take this opportunity. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. Well, it turns out they never believed that. They knew that this regime—in fact, they were negotiating with the regime before Rouhani had ever been elected, and so all that was kind of a ruse to camouflage the basic policy.

And I think Mr. Doran hit on it. This is a policy that understands the radial nature of the Iranian regime, understands the hostile nature of the Iranian regime, and is doing a deal with those hardliners to effectively solidify those hardliners. And they think that that is the way to have a more peaceful world.

And so the deception is important just for itself, but what it really masked is when we were going through all this—this is the biggest thing we have done this Congress—I thought that John Kerry and the President and these people were very naive about how they conceded the Iranian regime. It turns out they really weren't that naive. They knew exactly what we knew and they still wanted to go ahead with it. And so that is why I think it is very, very troubling.

And then we are seeing that now play out with really gratuitous concessions such as giving Iran indirect access to the American dollar. That wasn't even called for by the Iran deal, and yet that is something that the administration is doing.

And so I think that this is important. There are few—I don't think we have done an issue this important in the Congress in years and years. And so the idea that you are not up front with the American people is very important, but I think what this should allow us to do, I would like to tease out the implications now of this policy with somebody like Mr. Rhodes.

So, Mr. Doran, what is your view? I mean, it seems like Rouhani as a moderate, they admit it is a ruse, so they knew very well the nature of the regime, and they think that effectively us unilaterally stepping back from having a confrontational posture with Iran is going to be better for the world security?

Mr. DORAN. I think that's right. I think the President has a vision of the Middle East as a kind of roundtable now. The security architecture is a kind of roundtable and we have all the stakeholders around the roundtable, and the Iranians are stakeholders. And the assumption is that if we start treating them with respect and respecting their interests that they'll come toward us and that they—the key assumption—I think the key false assumption here is that they share the same interests that we do, the same core interests, this defeating ISIS, stabilizing Iraq, and so on.

I think particularly relevant are the views of Fred Hof at the Atlantic Council, who was President Obama's point man on Syria from 2009 to 2012. He's somebody who understands the—you know, there's nobody that's been closer to the Obama administration's policies on Syria than Fred Hof. And he has now come around to the view that President Obama has in effect recognized Syria as an Iranian sphere of interest and did so in order to reach the agreement with them.

Mr. DESANTIS. Well, I appreciate it. I think the upshot of all this, the nuclear obviously very significant, but even beyond that, Iran is really emerging as the dominant power in the region. How you can see that is good for our security is beyond me. And I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.

I now recognize the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Cartwright, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Mr. Chairman, at this time I would like to associate myself with the words of Representative Lynch of Massachusetts and also Representative Maloney of New York. I don't think it is possible to overstate the amount of study that went into the Iran deal on both sides of the aisle, and it is with great regret that I see it has turned into a political football the way it has.

Mr. Hannah, let me get this straight. You drew up the false talking points for Colin Powell when he spoke in front of the U.N., and you wrote in the talking points that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and that was what ended up in his speech. And that you are here today to question someone else's credibility and somebody else's professionalism. Am I getting that straight?

Mr. HANNAH. Not exactly. I'm not sure I'm questioning his professionalism. I'm questioning the tactics that he used. We based our intelligence on the intelligence that was there. It was wrong. That was a mistake. It wasn't any kind of purposeful desire to deceive or not give the American people what we ——

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. And you told us earlier in your testimony today that you drew up that speech not knowing if it was true, knowing that it would be vetted by the intelligence community, drawing it up as a piece of salesmanship to see if anything was true, and if it was, it would stick. Your words were quite clear on that.

And one of the parts of the salesmanship was that this idea that—was that the Bush administration cooked up this idea that there was yellowcake uranium coming from the African nation of Niger going to Saddam Hussein, and it was the American Ambassador Joe Wilson who gave the lie to that fiction. He said it was a bunch of nonsense. In fact, he wrote an op-ed in the New York Times in 2003 in July debunking the claim that yellowcake uranium was going to Saddam Hussein from Niger.

But, Mr. Hannah, you were one of Dick Cheney's top national security advisors, you worked with Cheney, you worked with Scooter Libby before he was convicted. Surely you discussed Ambassador Wilson's op-ed with him, with Vice President Cheney, especially since it was contradicting one of your key talking points in selling the war in Iraq. Did you talk about Ambassador Wilson's op-ed in the New York Times with Vice President Cheney?

Mr. HANNAH. I did not talk to the Vice President, but we did talk about it within the office and within the ——

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Did you talk to Scooter Libby about it?

Mr. HANNAH. I'm almost sure I did, yes.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. All right. Well, Ambassador Wilson wrote, "It did not take long to conclude that it was highly doubtful that any such transaction had ever taken place." He directly contradicted information that you put out publicly. In response, the Bush administration retaliated against him by publicly outing his wife Valerie Plame, who was a CIA operative at the time.

Mr. Hannah, my question for you is what was your role in outing Valerie Plame as a CIA operative?

Mr. HANNAH. I had no role in outing Valerie Plame as a CIA operative.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Mr. Hannah, special counsel was appointed to investigate the criminal leak of classified information. It was Pat-

rick Fitzgerald, special counsel. He concluded that there was—and I am quoting here—"concerted action by multiple people in the White House to discredit, punish, or seek revenge against Ambassador Wilson." Do you dispute those findings?

Mr. HANNAH. I haven't looked at them. I—yes, I dispute the way that the name of Valerie Plame reached the press. It was by a person who seemed to have no desire—was in the State Department. Deputy Secretary Armitage happened to mention her in a conversation with a reporter.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Mr. Hannah, the Bush administration smeared Ambassador Wilson and his wife, ruined her career, sacrificed a national security asset in the CIA all because Ambassador Wilson had the temerity to debunk your false claims, and he told the truth. Your boss and Dick Cheney's chief of staff Scooter Libby was convicted but then President Bush commuted his prison time. That is correct, isn't it?

Mr. HANNAH. I don't think those are the exact—he was never charged with releasing the name of a covert CIA operative.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. The second voice and that you talked about outing Valerie Plame, that was Karl Rove, wasn't it?

Mr. HANNAH. I have no idea. I know Karl's name was in there but I had no dealings with Karl.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I now recognize the gentleman from North Carolina, Mr. Meadows, for 5 minutes.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Rubin, let me come to you because as these decisions continue to get made with regards to the validity of the Iran deal as we would call it, decisions by Members of Congress hinge on very small sometimes often minute pieces of information where they can justify going one way or another. Do you believe that some of the statements by Mr. Rhodes was a factor at all in some of the Members of Congress casting their vote one way or another?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes, and I can give you examples if you would like.

Mr. MEADOWS. Please.

Mr. RUBIN. Well, first of all, when it comes to verification, according to U.S. law, incumbent with the Corker-Cardin compromise, all agreements are supposed to be presented to Congress. Now, it emerges that there were secret side agreements with the IAEA. One of these secret side agreements that comes into play with regard to verification is that the State Department decreed that the IAEA would not need to report to the level it had reported under sanctions, especially with regard to the possible military dimensions. So to say that the IAEA said that verification—that Iran is complying with the deal, that's like bragging that someone is the valedictorian of the summer school class.

Mr. MEADOWS. So ——

Mr. RUBIN. So it becomes a major problem. It lets them off the hook, and we only found out about that afterwards because the White House kept it secret.

Mr. MEADOWS. Well, we have had sworn testimony both in a number of House committees and Senate committees where the sworn testimony by administration officials were that there are no

and were no secret side agreements. Would you say that that is a credible argument under sworn testimony to make?

Mr. RUBIN. They are lying to Congress.

Mr. MEADOWS. All right. So that is a pretty bold statement, Mr. Rubin, that they are lying to Congress. So if we go back and look at the tapes when they say that there was no side agreements in sworn testimony, do you think it is incumbent upon this committee to hold those particular individuals who gave sworn testimony in contempt of Congress?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Mr. Rubin.

And let me go on a little bit further because the troubling aspect of this is for somehow members on the other side of the aisle to suggest that there is wrongdoing in previous administrations that would justify wrongdoing in a current administration.

Is it your opinion, Mr. Rubin, that regardless of who the administration might be, whether it be Republican or Democrat, that it is incumbent upon them to be honest and straightforward with Congress when they are negotiating something of this type of magnitude?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes. National security should not be a political football.

Mr. MEADOWS. So is it your sworn testimony here today that because of the talking points of Mr. Rhodes and the inaccuracy or, as you would characterize them, lying that took place, that the whole debate that transpired within Congress was based on faulty assumptions that had no relevance or relationship to truth?

Mr. RUBIN. It was almost as if instead of looking at the whole chessboard the White House was just directing Congress to look at four pieces.

Mr. MEADOWS. So if we were only looking at four pieces and something that is so critical to national security and to the security of our all Israel, do you think that it was disingenuous to suggest that some of the talking points that were coming out of the Israeli Government were indeed characterized as being dishonest and not truthful—do you think an apology is owed by this administration to that government?

Mr. RUBIN. You know, this administration has a sorry record at this point of coddling adversaries and throwing allies under the bus. Perhaps apologies are due when domestic Washington politics got in the way of serious foreign-policy discourse.

Mr. MEADOWS. I thank you, Mr. Rubin, and, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.

I will now recognize the gentleman from Vermont, Mr. Welch, for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

At the heart of this is a question whether this was—the one faced by the President, is an Iran without nuclear weapons better for our national security, for the Middle East and for the world than an Iran with nuclear weapons? That was the question.

And the engagement of Mr. Rhodes was one significant person among hundreds, and along with our best allies, France, Germany, England, and also our sometimes frenemies China and Russia. And

the collective decision of those countries and us was that the Iran nuclear deal was in our collective interest.

Now, there was fierce disagreement about that among the witnesses and among many of my colleagues here in Congress, but this was a long and complex negotiation that was ultimately ratified by our strongest allies. And there was a judgment that the Commander in Chief had to make as to whether or not this agreement was in the national security interest of this country.

I agreed with him. I worked closely with Mr. Rhodes and found him to be an exceptional public servant, knowledgeable, and despite what you are saying, candid and direct.

Let me just ask a couple questions here because the decision the President made was in contrast to decisions that a previous President made. Do each of you believe that the American people got the right information that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, each of you, Iraq? Thank you.

Mr. HANNAH. No, it's shown that it was false.

Mr. WELCH. Right.

Mr. DORAN. No.

Mr. RUBIN. No, the American people got what the intelligence community believed.

Mr. WELCH. Who has supervisory authority over the intelligence community, sir, Mr. Rubin?

Mr. RUBIN. Congress.

Mr. WELCH. The President has no role?

Mr. RUBIN. The buck stops with the President, but if we're talking about oversight ——

Mr. WELCH. You ——

Mr. RUBIN.—that's what separation of powers is about.

Mr. WELCH. All right. So you are saying—and by the way, I will go along with this. Congress blew it on the Iraq resolution. But are you suggesting to me that there is not ultimate responsibility for making the decision in evaluating the recommendations of the intelligence community on the matter of sending our troops to war, of spending trillions of dollars, throwing the Mideast up into upheaval, and he is not the one who ultimately bears the responsibility for that decision?

Mr. RUBIN. The President made the decision to go to war. I'm not willing to put the broad instability in the Middle East on his shoulders.

Mr. WELCH. I was ——

Mr. RUBIN. The Middle East needs to be accountable ——

Mr. WELCH. All right.

Mr. RUBIN.—for the Middle East.

Mr. WELCH. Second thing. So we went into this war in Iraq, we toppled Saddam Hussein, we were promised we would make money on the war. That was testimony from some of the President's advisors. It will be over in 60 days and the troops would be greeted with flowers in the street. It didn't work out that way.

Afghanistan, the longest war in the history of this country, we still have troops there. The place is a mess, nation-building, an arrogant policy embraced by a prior administration, didn't work out so great. Any of you think that Afghanistan is on a solid footing

for democracy at the moment, just a yes or no if I can get that from each of you?

Mr. RUBIN. No.

Mr. WELCH. Sir?

Mr. DORAN. No.

Mr. HANNAH. No.

Mr. WELCH. Sir?

Mr. HANNAH. No.

Mr. WELCH. All right. So we have to President who says, you know what, this war approach isn't so great, and he had to make a decision and he said, look, let's try negotiations. I supported sanctions. Every tough sanction that we were able to impose on Iran I supported, as did virtually all of the Democrats and Republicans. You know what? The sanctions work. It brought Iran to the table.

In this decision you are focusing on this fine public servant, Ben Rhodes, because of a newspaper article is something that then disregards the fact that we blew it in Iraq, we are blowing it in Afghanistan, and the President decided to pursue negotiations, got an agreement, and had the full support of those allies, the P5+1.

So if there are implementation issues, let's get on it. I am all for that. But to sit here and to suggest with this history of failure when war is the option that we should have done that, and that is essentially what the alternative was. That is essentially what the alternative was. I don't buy it, and I don't believe the American people buy it, and we are picking and choosing trying to come up with some little detail that somebody somewhere said to suggest that we ought to unravel the whole thing. I disagree.

I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize the gentleman from North Carolina, Mr. Walker, for 5 minutes.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On September 11, 2015, CNN stated, "The effort was one of the most aggressive lobbying drives ever to take shape between congressional Democrat leaders and the Obama White House on this bill H.R. 3461." Now, among the people who voted no were 25 Democrats. You heard today Mrs. Carolyn Maloney acknowledged that. She wasn't the only one on this particular committee. There were others.

My question is what did those 25 Members know that either the other Members did not know or sadly in some cases chose to ignore or even lobbied? In regards to Mr. Shapiro, we have heard a lot of talk today. You know, I am sure you guys may be dads, and it is always interesting when you confront one of your children and ask them if they did something wrong. The telltale sign or the giveaway is when they immediately acknowledged that another brother or sister did something wrong. That is what the smokescreen has been here today. You know, so much of the smokescreen has been about Mr. Hannah. Nobody wants to talk about Mr. Shapiro.

But let me talk about the difference if I could just for a second. Here is a big difference between Mr. Hannah and Mr. Shapiro. Mr. Shapiro enjoyed running to the press sharing false information. Mr. Shapiro became the poster boy, almost the spokesperson of a

flawed and horrific Iranian deal. The words "anytime, anywhere" continue to ring true as far as even to this day.

So my question, gentlemen, if you would please, whether intentional or not, did Mr. Shapiro in your opinion mislead the American public with this "anytime, anywhere," multiple times, Mr. Rubin?

Mr. RUBIN. Mr. Rhodes most certainly did. Now, the key here is that by lying about whether Rouhani was a moderate, he provided cover for the fact that the administration left Iran with 5,000 P–1 centrifuges and that the administration never had any hope, once this agreement expired, that the resulting Iran with an industrial-scale nuclear program would be any different. And I should note, sir, that that's the number of centrifuges which Pakistan built not a bomb but an arsenal.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Mr. Rubin. And maybe one correction. I said Mr. Shapiro. That would be Ben Rhodes.

Mr. Doran?

Mr. DORAN. Yes, I think he deceived the American people.

Mr. WALKER. Mr. Hannah?

Mr. HANNAH. If the article is accurate, yes, I think that he engaged in certain deceptions about what the administration was really up to and what we were facing in Iran.

Mr. WALKER. The Iran agreement lifts restrictions on arms sales to Iran after 5 years and after 8 removes the ban on Iran developing ballistic missiles potentially capable of reaching the United States. Question, Mr. Rubin. Can you elaborate on the threat the ballistic missile capability poses to the United States?

Mr. RUBIN. One of the problems I have with the reporting in the United States is people tend to pat themselves on the back every time there's a failed missile test. The fact of the matter is you learn a lot from a failed missile test and Iran has made clear in its public statements that it intends to continue with its ballistic missiles until such a time as they can strike anywhere, anytime.

I should also say a major flaw in the agreement is it bans the arms sales for 5 years for offensive weapons but never defines what offensive is, which is why Iran is on a shopping spree in Russia and China right now.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Mr. Rubin.

Mr. Doran?

Mr. DORAN. The—one of the things that the agreement did basically was remove ballistic missiles—effectively remove the ballistic missiles from the kind of sanctions that they were under by the change in language that the chairman mentioned.

If the administration had told Congress before the deal that the deal was going to result in an Iranian-Russian military alliance which was going to intervene in Syria and result in a rise of Iranian power around the region, I think we would've had a very different debate.

Mr. WALKER. Mr. Hannah, would you like to expound?

Mr. HANNAH. I would say the only thing about—on the ballistic missile I think everything my colleagues have said is right. It essentially—Iran is determined to do this, and it's important to note that the only really rational military use of these missiles is if you

can put a nuclear warhead on them. That makes them really militarily useful.

And the fact that Iran is so dedicated to expanding and building out this program, including eventually an ICBM, not only being able to hit all of their neighbors, including Israel, but eventually at some point in time being able to hit the United States, the fact they've had such deep cooperation with North Korea over the years that already has an ICBM capable of ranging the United States makes you believe that this nuclear deal is only kicking the can down the road, and they fully intend at a point in time when they're stronger and more able to stand up to sanctions and to American power to go ahead and, once restraints are limited, to go for a nuclear weapon.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, panel. With that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.

I will now recognize the gentleman from Missouri, Mr. Clay, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CLAY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Hannah, you worked for Dick Cheney. You actively participated in the preparation of Secretary Powell's infamous speech to the United Nations about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. I find it incredibly ironic that the chairman invited you here to testify about false White House narratives, given your involvement in that debacle.

One of the primary claims for war was that Saddam Hussein had so-called mobile labs that were roaming around inside Iraq manufacturing biological weapons. Secretary Powell showed a cartoon drawing of one of these mobile labs during his speech to the United Nations. We have a slide of it. Could someone please put it up on the screen?

[Slide.]

Mr. CLAY. Oh, there it is. Those are the mobile labs. Mr. Hannah, who drew this picture?

Mr. HANNAH. I do not know. I assume whoever in the intelligence community was responsible for the graphics for his presentation.

Mr. CLAY. And you used this is part of your preparation—as part of you preparing Mr. Powell for that speech?

Mr. HANNAH. My guess is that, yes, the issue of the biological labs would have been in whatever I provided ——

Mr. CLAY. Yes.

Mr. HANNAH.—in the draft.

Mr. CLAY. Okay. Let me read Secretary Powell, who stated during his speech to the United Nations, "one of the most worrisome things that emerges from the thick intelligence file we have on Iraq's biological weapons is the existence of mobile production facilities used to make biological agents." What was the source of that claim, Mr. Hannah?

Mr. HANNAH. I believe the primary source was—it was a defector and it was human intelligence. I think it was a defector.

Mr. CLAY. Wasn't it a source known as "Curveball"?

Mr. HANNAH. I believe so, yes.

Mr. CLAY. Okay. Secretary Powell highlighted this so-called eyewitness account in his United Nations speech. He warned that Iraq could use these mobile labs to produce enough biological weapons "in a single month to kill thousands upon thousands of people." Isn't that right?

Mr. HANNAH. Is that what he said?

Mr. CLAY. Yes.

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, if you're reading that accurately, yes.

Mr. CLAY. But we now know that that claim was false. In fact, Secretary Powell said his claim has "totally blown up in our faces." Do you agree with Secretary Powell?

Mr. HANNAH. I agree that the claim was false, yes.

Mr. CLAY. Is it true that no U.S. officials ever personally interviewed Curveball before we used—they used that information?

Mr. HANNAH. I don't know that firsthand, but I think the CIA has said that this was controlled by a German intelligence service.

Mr. CLAY. Yes. And it is true that the Germans who were speaking with Curveball could not believe you were using this information publicly because he was so unreliable. Isn't that true?

Mr. HANNAH. That's the claim. That was never relayed to me by the CIA. They were talking to the CIA, I think, at that time. If they said that, it wasn't a claim that was relayed to me.

Mr. CLAY. Okay. Well, I have an article from November 20, 2005, from the L.A. Times, and it says this: "The senior BND officer who supervised Curveball's case said he was aghast when he watched Powell misstate Curveball's claims as a justification for war. 'We were shocked,' the official said. 'Mein Gott, we had always told them it was not proven.'" Mr. Hannah, is that true?

Mr. HANNAH. Is it—well, I don't have any ——

Mr. CLAY. The Germans warned from the beginning that this information was not verified.

Mr. HANNAH. That's what historically it is reported. Between their communications, between their intelligence and the CIA, that's what the Germans have claimed.

Mr. CLAY. But it got into the Secretary's speech, into Secretary Powell's speech, you know? Your narrative was at best misleading and at worst blatantly false. As a result, thousands of people were killed and injured when this nation went to war based on those false claims. You know, do you have any remorse about that?

Mr. HANNAH. I have great, deep remorse about any American soldier that's lost, especially if it's based on information that we put out in good faith, that our intelligence communities and other intelligence communities around the world thought was true and thought we were acting in the best interest of the United States. So I do have great remorse about what ——

Mr. CLAY. Right, but it wasn't vetted. The information ——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The ——

Mr. CLAY.—you just threw it at the Secretary ——

Mr. HANNAH. No, that's not ——

Mr. CLAY.—and had ——

Mr. HANNAH. That's not true at all, Congressman. It's not accurate.

Mr. CLAY. It is true.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The gentleman's ——

Mr. CLAY. It is absolutely ——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The gentleman's time is expired.

Mr. CLAY.—a grave mistake.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The gentleman's time ——

Mr. CLAY. I guess I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The gentleman yields back. And I would also duly note that Mr. Hannah worked for President Clinton, served as a senior policy advisor to Secretary of State Warren Christopher as well.

So I will now recognize the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There seems to be a great deal of confusion as to the purpose of this hearing, which is supposed to be about this current administration White House narrative on the Iran nuclear deal. In Mr. Samuels' article, Leon Panetta stated that he, during his tenure as director of the CIA and Secretary of Defense, never saw the letters that Obama covertly sent to Iran's supreme leader in 2009 and 2012.

He goes on to say that he would like to believe that Tom Donilon, then-national security advisor; and Hillary Clinton, then-Secretary of State, had a chance to work on the offer they presented. Mr. Doran, let me begin with you. Is there any information confirming that Mr. Donilon or Secretary Clinton worked on those letters?

Mr. DORAN. None that I know of.

Mr. HICE. Okay. Mr. Rubin, is circumventing—let's use that word—of relevant department and agency heads in major foreign-policy decisions typical behavior for members of the National Security Council and other White House staffers?

Mr. RUBIN. It has become a problem that has grown with time dating back administrations.

Mr. HICE. So this is common practice these days?

Mr. RUBIN. This has become all too common, yes.

Mr. HICE. Mr. Hannah?

Mr. HANNAH. I do think something has changed in that regard. Just the fact that we have a deputy national security advisor for strategic communications whose job is both to help develop policy, it seems, as closest foreign-policy aide to the President and the guy who is selling it, I think, is worrisome.

I have got to say that in our administration you can make—maybe fault us for a lot, but the fact is that people like Karl Rove, who was in charge of our communications, never sat in National Security Council meetings. There was a pretty strict divide between those two.

Mr. HICE. Mr. Rubin, back to you. How much undue influence do you believe that these staffers have over national security policy?

Mr. RUBIN. As Mr. Hannah said, I believe that this administration has blurred a line that has existed over previous administrations, both Democratic and Republican.

Mr. HICE. Okay. Mr. Hannah, you mentioned in your testimony earlier that with one bold move the administration effectively made a radical shift in American foreign policy. Is that a correct assessment of your opinion?

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, it certainly is. Yes.

Mr. HICE. Okay. The question then comes down to who ultimately is responsible for that shift in foreign policy. Would you say it is Ben Rhodes, other staffers, or the President himself?

Mr. HANNAH. No, the policy toward Iran and toward the general retrenchment for the Middle East seems clearly to be President Obama's. He's in charge of that policy.

Mr. HICE. Okay. And yet there is some influencers appears to be in his life. Ben Rhodes, as referred to earlier, is recognized as the single most influential voice on foreign policy to the President. So what kind of role did he have in shaping this radical shift?

Mr. HANNAH. I don't know. And I do want to add the caveat that this is the shift presented by the policy, although I think it is consistent, as Mr. Doran has said, with the general thrust of the administration's policy toward Iran and toward the Middle East since 2008. I just don't think it's been presented that way. They want to remove and distance themselves from our closest allies in the Middle East, including Israel, and what they tell our allies and they tell the American people is that their relationship is stronger than ever and they will forever have Israel's back.

And that's justified by what's presented in the article. And it's that contradiction that worries me so much about what is really going on. Are we having a full and open debate about what we want to do? You've got to hand it to Mr. Trump. At least he says I want to get out of this place. It's too expensive, it's too costly, our allies are too much trouble. I want to distance ourselves from it.

Mr. HICE. So let me clarify what you are saying because it is troubling to me as well, extremely troubling that the American people, that Congress, that our allies, when there is such a radical shift of the magnitude of this type of foreign policy that the American people, Congress, and our allies are not aware of it. So the only way—do you believe the American people and Congress would support a shift that major had they known about it?

Mr. HANNAH. No. I think as Mr. Doran said—and Secretary Panetta is in fact quoted in the piece as saying had they done it, they'd have gotten the blank kicked out of them.

Mr. HICE. Absolutely. So the only way to pull this over the American people's eyes and Congress and our allies is by spinning the truth and maybe people get on board something that is not indeed reality or truth.

Mr. HANNAH. That is the extremely strong suggestion of the article that you had to spin it ——

Mr. HICE. But yes, no, then right down the line, would you agree with that assessment?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes.

Mr. HICE. I will yield.

Mr. DORAN. Yes.

Mr. HICE. Mr. Hannah?

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, sir.

Mr. HICE. All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize the gentleman from California, Mr. DeSaulnier, for 5 minutes.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Rubin, first, I assume you are vigorously opposed to the Iran agreement?

Mr. RUBIN. I'm opposed to it, yes.

Mr. DESAULNIER. And you have been all along?

Mr. RUBIN. I thought that there could be a much stronger agreement and we could have made much better use of leverage to get a much more favorable agreement.

Mr. DESAULNIER. But you are opposed.

Mr. Doran?

Mr. DORAN. Yes.

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, I'd associate myself with Michael's ——

Mr. DESAULNIER. So just to be clear, for instance, former Secretary of State Colin Powell, he has called the verification regime "vigorous in the agreement. These are remarkable changes." And so we have stopped this highway race that they were going down, and I think that is very, very important. Would any of you agree with Secretary Powell's quote in his view of this agreement?

Mr. HANNAH. It reminds me of the statements in support of the agreed framework with North Korea, which we now know did not merit those endorsements.

Mr. DESAULNIER. So you wouldn't agree with it?

Mr. HANNAH. No, I would not.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Brent Scowcroft, former advisor to Presidents Ford and George H.W. Bush, "To turn our back on this accomplishment would be an abdication of the United States' unique role and responsibility incurring justified dismay among our allies and friends." You would disagree with that quote as well, Mr. Doran? Do you have any comment?

Mr. DORAN. Yes, I disagree with it.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Mr. Hannah, it strikes me that in your response to some of my colleagues on this side of the aisle's comments about your role with Vice President Cheney and the agreement or the decision to invade Iraq, it was a mistake and you apologized for that in your own way, but we should just move on from that. Is that a misrepresentation of how you view your actions?

Mr. HANNAH. It's somewhat more complicated than that but too long to explain.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Of course.

Mr. HANNAH. But, yes, that—if the case depended on a weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, that was false, and the American people didn't understand the grounds on which we were going to war, to take out a guy who was a horrible dictator and a major strategic threat to American interests, that the American Congress in 1998 passed a law almost unanimously saying—the Iraq Liberation Act saying we've got to do something to get rid of this guy, didn't say war necessarily but it says we've got a big trouble with Iraq, we need to do something about it.

Mr. DESAULNIER. But it was based, wouldn't you say, on the assumption that there were weapons of mass destruction in these mobile biological labs?

Mr. HANNAH. No, in 1998 it was the Clinton administration. You had Secretary of Defense Cohen standing up and holding up a bag of sugar and saying if Saddam had this much biological weapons,

he would kill thousands upon thousands of people that he represents ——

Mr. DESAULNIER. Right.

Mr. HANNAH.—a major threat to the United States.

Mr. DESAULNIER. But that wasn't it ——

Mr. HANNAH. That was the basis ——

Mr. DESAULNIER. But that wasn't the part of the discussion we were having as a nation in order to commit ourselves to send young American to war in Iraq. It was the weapons of mass destruction, which you admit now was a mistake.

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, that intelligence clearly was false. A bipartisan commission ——

Mr. DESAULNIER. Right.

Mr. HANNAH.—looked at it and said most of that was wrong.

Mr. DESAULNIER. So, on balance, comparing these two processes, whether you think it is spin or not, the consequences strike me as being much more significance, obviously, to the decision to tell people it was based—we were going to invade Iraq not because we didn't like Saddam Hussein, although that was the case as well, but that there were biological weapons and weapons of mass destruction versus what we see with the Iran nuclear deal.

Now, you can assume as experts that this is not going to turn out well, but to this point they are not equal in terms of the negative consequences to this country and the stability of that peace in the Middle East. Would you say? I mean, how could you possibly say at this point?

Mr. HANNAH. Listen, I would say that the—that you're right, that war and the death of the—and injury of American soldiers is a terrible, terrible price to pay. We haven't seen a lot of Americans dying, but just take a look at the Middle East right now after 8 years of this administration. It's hard to say it's better because Americans aren't dying but half-a-million Syrians have died, chemical weapons are being used, Russian and Iranian influence ——

Mr. DESAULNIER. But that all was because of a decision that you were very much a part of to get the country to go to war in Iraq.

Mr. HANNAH. Well, you know it's much more complicated than that because it ——

Mr. DESAULNIER. No, it isn't.

Mr. HANNAH. It is, Congressman ——

Mr. DESAULNIER. Not from my perspective. I am not an expert ——

Mr. HANNAH. Okay.

Mr. DESAULNIER.—but I have gone to funerals of constituents who are dead in their 20s and their teens because you and Vice President Cheney encouraged the invasion of Iraq.

Mr. HANNAH. It was because Iranian IEDs, Iranian EFPs that killed Americans, not a narrative, and that is why it's ——

Mr. DESAULNIER. How did that action stop ——

Mr. HANNAH.—so not understandable that we're letting Iraq off the hook.

Mr. DESAULNIER. How did our invading Iraq stop those other actions? You have sat here and testified they continue to support terrorists in the region.

Mr. HANNAH. We didn't invade the Gaza Strip, we didn't invade Yemen, we didn't invade Syria, and yet we see Iran on the warpath all over. And what this agreement did was take the budget of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the hard currency available to it, and increase it by an order of magnitude.

Mr. DESAULNIER. They were doing that before. That is why we went into Iraq is what you are saying. Yes, no?

Mr. HANNAH. No, I'm saying you are trying to ——

Mr. DESAULNIER. You said ——

Mr. HANNAH.—blame a narrative on the fact that Iran has been the leading state sponsor of terrorism according to the U.S. Department of State since 1984, and to try to somehow distract from that and distract from a false—a narrative of false moderation is counterproductive, I would argue.

Mr. DESAULNIER. I just have to tell you in all honesty I feel like I am in a replay of a sequel of Dr. Strangelove here, and it would be nice to have a balanced discussion about this. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I would agree with the gentleman. It would be nice to have a balanced discussion. That is why we invited Mr. Rhodes and we invited the participation of Senator Cotton, who is on the other end of the spectrum. But when the White House refuses to make them available and Democrats call no witnesses, we can't have that discussion. That is what a shame about today's hearing.

I now recognize the gentleman from Oklahoma, Mr. Russell, for 5 minutes.

Mr. RUSSELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In dealing with the Iran nuclear issue, I am saddened that rather than look forward to how best secure the United States from a real nuclear threat, we see a progressive attack on our entry into Iraq to cloud the issue. It is almost like the classic page from the Communist playbook that advises "admit nothing, deny everything, and make counteraccusation."

I take exception to the twisted narrative that our entry into Iraq was based upon bad faith and false pretense. If an abusive neighbor attacks everyone in his neighborhood and then threatens them with total destruction, are we to believe, as progressives seem too, that we should sit idly by and not take action to secure ourselves from such threat?

The truth of the matter is that Saddam had technical capacity to develop a bomb. In the summer of 2003 I have firsthand knowledge that the 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry, along with special operations forces, they secured a Zippe centrifuge, which is of the highest order for refinement of nuclear material, and it was smuggled out of Europe. They obtained technical drawings and hardware from the garden of Saddam's nuclear physicist Dr. Mahdi Obeidi. Dr. Obeidi's account of Saddam's threat is well-documented in his book The Bomb in My Garden, an account the CIA describes as largely accurate and balanced.

I remember as I served in Iraq during that time as we were hunting for Saddam that this would be major news as the Zippe centrifuge and technical drawings would come to light. Instead, it is largely hidden to this day.

It is also interesting to note that senior leaders and one in particular who relayed to me that during a major Syrian flood he was directed by Saddam to move material to an eastern Syrian site. This was material of both a nuclear and a chemical nature. It is interesting that that very site was attacked during Operation Orchard by the Israeli Air Force, and that site was completely destroyed because they were making a nuclear reactor. Again, the silence on these issues is deafening.

As one of the commanders that helped track down and capture Saddam Hussein, it is very emotional for me to hear Members of this Congress condemn our efforts, but it is not surprising. From day one, as we sacrificed in the field, progressives in this Congress condemned our efforts with progressive leaders even going so far as to declare that the war was lost while we buried our friends in the field. That steady drumbeat forced us to bury friends not only there but ship come home and put them in Section 60 of Arlington, and then we come home to watch politicians, many still in office, destroy what we fought for. They persist even today, Mr. Chairman.

I will never regret bringing a dictator to justice, and I am proud to have played a part in it. History, should we even allow it, will judge us and our efforts in Iraq kindly. I am not sure the same can be said of Congress.

Now, we turn to yet another nuclear threat with Iran. Dr. Obeidi, in reflecting on our security, stated that to succeed "illicit nuclear programs share a common weak spot. They need international complicity." In Mr. Rhodes and this administration, it appears he provided and they provided all of it to Iran.

Mr. Rubin, how and how early did the administration start talking about minimizing congressional oversight of the Iran deal?

Mr. RUBIN. I am not privy to the internal discussions within the administration, but it appears from secondhand sources almost from the beginning.

Mr. RUSSELL. I have passed the Iran Terror Financier Act, the only real effort to oppose the nuclear deal, which now sits in the Senate. And with Mr. Rhodes' exposure, the need for congressional oversight, there are key provisions in my measure and it sits in the Senate. That language even today could be acted upon by the Senate that would provide us key oversight on any decisions.

The President acted unconstitutionally. While he is free to make agreements and have negotiation, he is not free to bind us with treaty-like obligation. Do you think that if we pass the key provisions out of the measure that currently sits in the Senate that would increase that oversight? As was noted last week by Politico, do you think that it would be helpful in deterring and at least making what we do have better?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes. And very briefly, the strongest, most effective actions that have been taken by Iran both under the Clinton administration with executive orders and under the Bush and Obama administrations have been the unilateral American sanctions rather than the watered down United Nations Security Council resolutions, even though the Bush administration achieved a number of those as well.

Mr. RUSSELL. Thank you, sir, and thank you, gentlemen, for your service and thank you for being here today.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Mr. Russell, we thank you for your service and your sacrifice and your time serving this country, and we are better for it. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentlewoman from New Mexico, Ms. Lujan Grisham, for 5 minutes.

Ms. LUJAN GRISHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks for the opportunity to talk about what I think is really important in this agreement and issue, which is making sure that we are holding Iran accountable, that we are clear about what those accountability issues and measures are, and not just how that is being communicated but how that is being verified.

And my only disappointment in the hearing today, Mr. Chairman, is that we are having conversations about what-ifs but we are not talking to the folks—with no disrespect to the panel members—about really who is enforcing, who is accountable, and certainly for my constituents and the number of individuals that I spoke to with expertise in this area either as concerned citizens or organizations and the administration and people outside of the administration, that is my core focus.

And in fact, as part of the hearing of this nature, I was more concerned and more—I would like information about the reductions in the uranium stockpile, the status of the centrifuges in Iran, the monitoring and detection measures that the U.S. has, and then our allies have also been doing. Does anyone on the panel have any specific authority or expertise on any of those issues because you are directly involved in that accountability?

Mr. RUBIN. Are we serving a government right now or am I in IAEA? The answer to that is no. However, we have dedicated years to the study of these issues and so could give suggestions if you would like.

Ms. LUJAN GRISHAM. Well, and I appreciate that. For example, I have spent 30 years in the health care industry, and I have a variety, I think, of very credible opinions, but at the end of the day I am not your physician so I can't talk to you about your specific health. And what I really think is important with, again, no disrespect, gentlemen—and one of the things that I appreciate about this hearing is that we tackle tough subjects. I expect that in this committee. I expect that of the chairman, particularly in this issue, keeping America safe, being clear that we will make sure that everyone is accountable, that we are clear about what the risks are, I think that those are all incredibly valuable things for us to be paying attention to.

And I can tell you that my constituents back home, in addition to the country, expect that from me. But to know exactly where we are more than opining based on—again, no disrespect to your credentials, far better than mine on these specific issues directly—but again, I think, Mr. Chairman, we ought to be talking to the individuals who are absolutely responsible for assuring, verifying these issues so that we know exactly what we are dealing with because they are actually doing it.

What can we be doing better to make sure that we are getting that information and that our accountability enforcement efforts are what they ought to be and that we have a way bipartisan to weigh in to reshape them productively if need be? Anyone?

Mr. DORAN. I totally agree with you. I agree with everything you have said, and I think that I would like to have a discussion with those people. But the administration has worked to obfuscate this entire—the agreement and all the processes around it. And I think that's one of my main messages here is not that I'm the expert on centrifuges or that I'm the expert on sanctions and so on. It's that those of us who would like to understand what is happening are not being given the information we need. We can't have an open and honest debate about this because we really don't have the key facts. And I think if you read my prepared statement, you'll see that I've made, I think, a pretty cogent argument to that fact.

Ms. LUJAN GRISHAM. Anyone else?

Mr. RUBIN. Well, what I would say is when surgery goes awry, oftentimes the doctors will conduct an after-action study about what went wrong. Likewise in the private sector, businessmen will practice negotiations and look at what they might have done better. In the U.S. military, sergeants, majors, and chiefs will berate soldiers from making mistakes not for a political ax to grind but to make them better soldiers and sailors.

What the State Department has not done in the last 60 years is conduct an after-action report about high-profile diplomacy. This goes across administrations. So, yes, we can say that this is what the IAEA needs to be looking for, that they need not only to be looking at declared nuclear facilities but also undeclared nuclear facilities, that there has to be independent testing of Iran—of work being conducted on Iranian nuclear military sites and that there has to be extraterritoriality in the inspection in case Iran takes some of its lab work to North Korea.

Those are all specific things which could be done, but we have to go broader and look at why diplomacy hasn't worked. Let's have the State Department be introspective. If they're not going to do the due diligence, the Congress should.

Ms. LUJAN GRISHAM. And I appreciate those points, and my time is up, but in response, again, without having that expertise in this hearing, we don't have a debate based on facts. And I might disagree with you about our efforts in what I am going to call complex and high-level diplomacy and maybe on some points I am not, but without having those individuals before this committee, we are ill-equipped to do that.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I concur with the gentlewoman. That is why it is so frustrating when Mr. Rhodes, who is at the center of this, was, as of Monday, going to appear and then suddenly executive privilege is claimed and they decide not to have him. So you are right. The Congress is kept in the dark because the administration won't share the information with us.

Ms. LUJAN GRISHAM. And, Mr. Chairman, with—and the chairman is very patient with me and this is not a place to debate that, and I appreciate the chairman more than he knows, and I mean that earnestly, but again, I am not sure that Mr. Rhodes is the

right person. But we do. We need to continue to have an effort to get facts so that we are not speculating about where we are in enforcing this agreement. And that is all of our responsibility.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman, for again giving me maybe the last word, and thank you for being patient with me today, sir.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you. I thank the gentlewoman.

I now recognize the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Grothman, for 5 minutes. Microphone, please. Microphone.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Could we have slide 3?

[Slide.]

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. I better read it over here. The easiest way for—okay. This is a quote from a New York Times article. "The easiest way for the White House to shape the news, he explained, is from the briefing podiums, each of which has its own dedicated press corps. 'But then there are sort of these force multipliers,' he said, adding that 'We have our compadres. I will reach out to a couple of people and, you know, I wouldn't want to name them. I will say, hey, look, some people are spinning this narrative that this is a sign of American weakness.'"

Well, since he won't name them, Mr. Doran, do you want to take a shot at who was he speaking of when they talk about the administration's compadres in the press who helped them spin the White House narrative and who in the press do you think he is kind of referring to there?

Mr. DORAN. I wouldn't want to speculate on individuals. I would just note that in general the major newspapers and the major networks have supported the line coming out of the White House. And one of the things that Mr. Rhodes drew our attention to and I think it's important to focus on is the blurring—as a result of the fact that newspapers and networks are reporting foreign news from Washington, we have this blurring now of opinion and news so that the line that Mr. Rhodes is putting out find its way into news articles and that it also finds its way into opinion columns at the same time, which then they had a kind of mutually reinforcing effect.

But we also find at the same time that only about 13 percent of Americans actually believe what they're hearing anymore, and I think we can draw our own conclusions about that.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Well, having been here for 14 months, I don't believe anything I read in the paper around here, but the major papers, do you believe like the New York Times, the Washington Post, would you consider those major papers you are talking about?

Mr. DORAN. Yes, you can see like—I'll give an example. You know, recently, the Saudis put to death this cleric Nimr al-Nimr, a Shiite. The line that you got universally in the newspapers, in the news articles, and in the opinion pieces and then on the networks was that there's a huge Saudi sectarian escalation which is destroying relations with Iran. All the things that Iran is doing around the region, flexing of its muscles like Dr. Rubin described, we're not hearing about. And I believe that that was news reported out of the White House.

I'll just say one more thing about this, too. Because of the rise of the internet, we have all these nontraditional news sources now that people go to, and it puts enormous pressure on the serious reporters that are out there. I mean, I'm thinking of people like

David Sanger and Michael Gordon of the New York Times. These are very serious reporters, right? But they know—and if they don't know it and if they're not thinking about it directly in their own minds, their editors know that if they don't—that if they take a line that is hostile to what the White House is saying, the White House can go to Vox or to BuzzFeed or somewhere else and give the story.

So even reporters that I think we would all agree are extremely serious reporters are under pressure, I think, not to report a story that's going to harm their access to the White House.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. And just so we understand, we mentioned the New York Times and Washington Post by name, but because they feed the Associated Press, just because I don't get the New York Times and Washington Post doesn't mean that that is not the article that I am getting, say, in almost any other major newspaper around the country, correct?

Mr. DORAN. Yes, it replicates itself immediately.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. Now, when he talks about his compadres, do you have any opinion if he is talking about anybody in the think tank or policy world?

Mr. DORAN. Well, the two that were mentioned in the article were the Ploughshares Fund and NIAC, but it is not hard—you know, if you followed would happen on Twitter when this article came out, the friends of the White House and the friends of the echo chamber, you could identify the echo chamber by seeing how they pounced immediately on the article, picked out one or two little facts that they could criticize, and built a whole, I think, specious argument that the author had a political agenda in this. And then that narrative then was spun out of social media and into the mainstream media.

Mr. RUBIN. If I may say very quickly, sir, I don't know David Samuels, the author of the article, but to criticize him for not being supportive of the Iran deal illustrates the problem of an echo chamber because journalists saying that only sympathetic journalists that can cover the administration, that itself is a sign of a much greater problem. Huge problem.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Can I play video here or are we done with our time?

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Let me go to Mr. Palmer ——

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. I want to come back. Yes.

Chairman CHAFFETZ.—and then if you want to come back, we will come back.

Now, we are going to recognize the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Palmer.

Mr. PALMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think we have about worn this out. We have covered everything from Iran to the fact that I think Mr. Meadows establish very clearly that we were lied to by this administration, perhaps even with contempt.

But I want to go to something else that I think is really at the core of what we ought to be talking about, and that is a key promise from the administration is that the Iran nuclear deal would provide the public and lawmakers with assurance that Iran was meeting its obligation, and Iran's ability to engage in proliferation would the substantially mitigated.

I mean, we can go back to the Rhodes statement that it would be the strongest inspection regime that any country faces in the world. We could go to what the State Department posted on the Web site, that the International Atomic Energy Agency would have regular access to all of Iran's nuclear facilities, that they would be providing the IAEA with much greater access, that it would require—that they be granted access to investigate suspicious sites or allegations of covert enrichment. But that is not what has actually happened.

I want to share with you that after the deal was implemented, the International Atomic Energy Agency published its regular report on Iran. I think it came out in February. And the report contained less information than the IAEA had regularly provided about Iran before the deal was in place. In fact, when asked about these gaps, IAEA Director General Amano said that, in fact, the deal restricted the IAEA's ability to report publicly about Iran's nuclear program.

Mr. Rubin, given that, how much confidence do you have in this deal?

Mr. RUBIN. I have very little confidence in this deal for reasons that I've outlined in my written testimony. It falls far short of the most rigorous inspection regime ever, and the danger isn't just in Iran, very briefly. The danger is that it permanently dilutes the standard by which other potential proliferators are held.

Mr. PALMER. But would you agree that General Amano's statement validates the concerns that you expressed about the deal from the very beginning?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes, I would.

Mr. PALMER. Would you also say that, given this statement from the General Amano, that the exaggerated concessions that this administration claims that they obtained might be called into question as well?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes, I would.

Mr. PALMER. You know, we have been talking about echo chambers, we talked about misrepresentations. I go back to the statement that Secretary of State Kerry made that he was the chief negotiator. We know that the framework of the deal was already in place before he really got involved, these statements that have been brought out in the New York Times Magazine article, but what we really haven't talked about is the fact that the deal is a fraud, and Iran could be on a path to a nuclear weapon.

And here is something else that we haven't really discussed that I think we need to be talking about, too, is that according to Ben Rhodes that this deal also is part of a plan to abandon our friends and allies in the Middle East. Does that give you some concern, Mr. Rubin?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes, it does.

Mr. PALMER. How about you, Mr. Doran?

Mr. DORAN. Absolutely.

Mr. PALMER. How about you, Mr. Hannah?

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, very much so.

Mr. PALMER. Do you believe that the Obama administration withheld information from Congress about the deal intentionally?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes, I do.

Mr. PALMER. Do you believe that was in violation of the Corker-Cardin agreement, the law that he signed into law himself?

Mr. RUBIN. It absolutely was, and on top of which the Corker-Cardin amendment was written in such a way to prevent this from happening. And unfortunately, the administration simply broke the law.

Mr. PALMER. I couldn't agree more. Peter Roskam, the gentleman from Illinois, introduced a House resolution and argued that very point. The House passed that resolution that this deal was illegal from the get-go because the Corker-Cardin law required that all information be provided to Congress, including the side agreements, and it clearly wasn't.

I think there is one issue, really one question that we need to ask, and I will ask each one of you to answer this. Do you believe this deal has actually assured Iran a path to developing a nuclear weapon?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes. At the very least it leaves Iran with an industrial-scale nuclear program upon the expiration of the controls, and the administration went into this knowing that the Iranian regime was not moderate.

Mr. PALMER. Mr. Doran?

Mr. DORAN. I agree with all that.

Mr. PALMER. Mr. Hannah?

Mr. HANNAH. Yes, I agree with Michael's conclusion.

Mr. PALMER. Mr. Chairman, I am not sure it is the jurisdiction of this committee to look into the ramifications of that possibility, but I do think that is essentially what we should have been talking about this entire time. And the fact that this administration misled Congress is one issue that I think we need to pursue, but I think at some point Congress needs to look at what our positions ought to be going forward in regard to Iran.

I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I totally agree with the gentleman and appreciate his perspective. And he is right. That is the ultimate fear that we have is that Iran, not a friend of the United States, not a friendly partner within the world community, that they are even more so on a pathway to develop a nuclear weapon, and that is what is scary.

We will go one more time to Mr. Grothman of Wisconsin.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Sure. And we will go one more time to Ben Rhodes—I mean, not to Ben Rhodes, to Michael Doran.

Ben Rhodes commented on the White House's desire to avoid scrutiny. And I would like to look at video clip D and ask you a question about it.

[Video shown.]

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. How do you feel the process circumvented the transparency with Congress?

Mr. DORAN. They structured the deal so that they could take it to the Security Council and effectively move out on it before Congress ever really got to look at it.

And there's a second dimension to what we just heard that's disturbing. That was Ben Rhodes talking to a group of progressive activists and telling them what was coming down the line and giving them the talking points about how to support it. I mean, that—

what you just heard was Ben Rhodes talking to the foot soldiers that are going to create—that are—in his echo chamber.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Tell us again what those foot soldiers are.

Mr. DORAN. I'm sorry?

Mr. GROTHMAN. Tell us again what you describe those foot soldiers ——

Mr. DORAN. Oh, those—in this case these are progressive—this is progressive groups. I don't know the exact—what we're talking—they regularly briefed dozens of progressive groups. I'm not talking about pseudo-experts on nuclear proliferation and things that that. I'm talking about just grassroots progressive organizations to get—to help them carry the water politically.

But it's one of these blurring of the lines between rules that I don't think we saw in previous administrations where you have somebody who's in charge of communications but yet sitting at the table with the Secretary of Defense and sometimes telling the Secretary of Defense that he's wrong and then going out and talking to domestic political groups and telling them how to go militate in favor of the foreign policy of the administration.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. Thank you.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman. I thank you all for your attendance here, your participation, your expertise in illuminating what is a very disturbing situation.

The committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:46 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

The New York Times Magazine http://nyti.ms/1T2WEuu

The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign-Policy Guru

How Ben Rhodes rewrote the rules of diplomacy for the digital age.

By DAVID SAMUELS MAY 5, 2016

Picture him as a young man, standing on the waterfront in North Williamsburg, at a polling site, on Sept. 11, 2001, which was Election Day in New York City. He saw the planes hit the towers, an unforgettable moment of sheer disbelief followed by panic and shock and lasting horror, a scene that eerily reminded him, in the aftermath, of the cover of the Don DeLillo novel "Underworld."

Everything changed that day. But the way it changed Ben Rhodes's life is still unique, and perhaps not strictly believable, even as fiction. He was in the second year of the M.F.A. program at N.Y.U., writing short stories about losers in garden apartments and imagining that soon he would be published in literary magazines, acquire an agent and produce a novel by the time he turned 26. He saw the first tower go down, and after that he walked around for a while, until he ran into someone he knew, and they went back to her shared Williamsburg apartment and tried to find a television that worked, and when he came back outside, everyone was taking pictures of the towers in flames. He saw an Arab guy sobbing on the subway. "That image has always stayed with me," he says. "Because I think he knew more than we did about what was

going to happen." Writing Frederick Barthelme knockoffs suddenly seemed like a waste of time.

"I immediately developed this idea that, you know, maybe I want to try to write about international affairs," he explained. "In retrospect, I had no idea what that meant." His mother's closest friend growing up ran the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, which then published Foreign Policy. He sent her a letter and included what would wind up being his only piece of published fiction, a short story that appeared in The Beloit Fiction Journal. It was titled "The Goldfish Smiles, You Smile Back." The story still haunts him, he says, because "it foreshadowed my entire life."

It's the day of President Obama's final State of the Union address, Jan. 12, and the news inside the White House is not good. Luckily, the reporters on the couch in the West Wing waiting room don't know it yet. The cream of the crop are here this early p.m. for a private, off-the-record lunch with the president, who will preview his annual remarks to Congress over a meal that is reported to be among the best in the White House chef's repertoire.

"Blitzer!" a man calls out. A small figure in a long navy cashmere overcoat turns around, in mock surprise.

"You don't write, you don't call," Wolf Blitzer, the CNN anchorman, parries.

"Well, *you* can call," shoots back his former colleague Roland Martin. Their repartee thus concluded, they move on to the mutually fascinating subject of Washington traffic jams. "I used to have a 9:30 hit on CNN," Martin reminisces. "The office was 8.2 miles from my home. It took me 45 minutes." The CBS News anchor Scott Pelley tells a story about how members of the press destroyed the lawn during the Monica Lewinsky scandal and were told that they would be allowed back once the grass was replanted. The National Park Service replanted the grass outside the White House, but the journalists weren't allowed back on the lawn.

Unnoticed by the reporters, Ben Rhodes walks through the room, a half-beat behind a woman in leopard-print heels. He is holding a phone to his ear, repeating his mantra: "I'm not important. You're important."

The Boy Wonder of the Obama White House is now 38. He heads downstairs to his windowless basement office, which is divided into two parts. In the front office, his assistant, Rumana Ahmed, and his deputy, Ned Price, are squeezed behind desks, which face a large television screen, from which CNN blares nonstop. Large pictures of Obama adorn the walls. Here is the president adjusting Rhodes's tie; presenting his darling baby daughter, Ella, with a flower; and smiling wide while playing with Ella on a giant rug that says "E Pluribus Unum."

For much of the past five weeks, Rhodes has been channeling the president's consciousness into what was imagined as an optimistic, forward-looking final State of the Union. Now, from the flat screens, a challenge to that narrative arises: Iran has seized two small boats containing 10 American sailors. Rhodes found out about the Iranian action earlier that morning but was trying to keep it out of the news until after the president's speech. "They can't keep a secret for two hours," Rhodes says, with a tone of mild exasperation at the break in message discipline.

As the deputy national security adviser for strategic communications, Rhodes writes the president's speeches, plans his trips abroad and runs communications strategy across the White House, tasks that, taken individually, give little sense of the importance of his role. He is, according to the consensus of the two dozen current and former White House insiders I talked to, the single most influential voice shaping American foreign policy aside from Potus himself. The president and Rhodes communicate "regularly, several times a day," according to Denis McDonough, Obama's chief of staff, who is known for captaining a tight ship. "I see it throughout the day in person," he says, adding that he is sure that in addition to the two to three hours that Rhodes might spend with Obama daily, the two men communicate

remotely throughout the day via email and phone calls. Rhodes strategized and ran the successful Iran-deal messaging campaign, helped negotiate the opening of American relations with Cuba after a hiatus of more than 50 years and has been a co-writer of all of Obama's major foreign-policy speeches. "Every day he does 12 jobs, and he does them better than the other people who have those jobs," Terry Szuplat, the longest-tenured member of the National Security Council speechwriting corps, told me. On the largest and smallest questions alike, the voice in which America speaks to the world is that of Ben Rhodes.

Like Obama, Rhodes is a storyteller who uses a writer's tools to advance an agenda that is packaged as politics but is often quite personal. He is adept at constructing overarching plotlines with heroes and villains, their conflicts and motivations supported by flurries of carefully chosen adjectives, quotations and leaks from named and unnamed senior officials. He is the master shaper and retailer of Obama's foreign-policy narratives, at a time when the killer wave of social media has washed away the sand castles of the traditional press. His ability to navigate and shape this new environment makes him a more effective and powerful extension of the president's will than any number of policy advisers or diplomats or spies. His lack of conventional real-world experience of the kind that normally precedes responsibility for the fate of nations — like military or diplomatic service, or even a master's degree in international relations, rather than creative writing — is still startling.

Part of what accounts for Rhodes's influence is his "mind meld" with the president. Nearly everyone I spoke to about Rhodes used the phrase "mind meld" verbatim, some with casual assurance and others in the hushed tones that are usually reserved for special insights. He doesn't think for the president, but he knows what the president is thinking, which is a source of tremendous power. One day, when Rhodes and I were sitting in his boiler-room office, he confessed, with a touch of bafflement, "I don't know anymore where I begin and Obama ends."

Standing in his front office before the State of the Union, Rhodes quickly does the political math on the breaking Iran story. "Now they'll show scary pictures of people praying to the supreme leader," he predicts, looking at the screen. Three beats more, and his brain has spun a story line to stanch the bleeding. He turns to Price. "We're resolving this, because we have relationships," he says.

Price turns to his computer and begins tapping away at the administration's well-cultivated network of officials, talking heads, columnists and newspaper reporters, web jockeys and outside advocates who can tweet at critics and tweak their stories backed up by quotations from "senior White House officials" and "spokespeople." I watch the message bounce from Rhodes's brain to Price's keyboard to the three big briefing podiums — the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon — and across the Twitterverse, where it springs to life in dozens of insta-stories, which over the next five hours don formal dress for mainstream outlets. It's a tutorial in the making of a digital news microclimate — a storm that is easy to mistake these days for a fact of nature, but whose author is sitting next to me right now.

Rhodes logs into his computer. "It's the middle of the [expletive] night in Iran," he grumbles. Price looks up from his keyboard to provide a messaging update: "Considering that they have 10 of our guys in custody, we're doing O.K."

With three hours to go until the president's address to Congress, Rhodes grabs a big Gatorade and starts combing through the text of the State of the Union address. I peek over his shoulder, to get a sense of the meta-narrative that will shape dozens of thumb-suckers in the days and weeks to follow. One sentence reads: "But as we focus on destroying ISIL, over-the-top claims that this is World War III just play into their hands." He retypes a word, then changes it back, before continuing with his edit. "Masses of fighters on the back of pickup trucks, twisted souls plotting in apartments or garages — they pose an enormous danger to civilians; they have to be stopped. But they do not

threaten our national existence."

Watching Rhodes work, I remember that he is still, chiefly, a writer, who is using a new set of tools — along with the traditional arts of narrative and spin — to create stories of great consequence on the biggest page imaginable. The narratives he frames, the voices of senior officials, the columnists and reporters whose work he skillfully shapes and ventriloquizes, and even the president's own speeches and talking points, are the only dots of color in a much larger vision about who Americans are and where we are going that Rhodes and the president have been formulating together over the past seven years. When I asked Jon Favreau, Obama's lead speechwriter in the 2008 campaign, and a close friend of Rhodes's, whether he or Rhodes or the president had ever thought of their individual speeches and bits of policy making as part of some larger restructuring of the American narrative, he replied, "We saw that as our entire job."

Having recently spent time working in Hollywood, I realize during our conversations that the role Rhodes plays in the White House bears less resemblance to any specific character on Beltway-insider TV shows like "The West Wing" or "House of Cards" than it does to the people who create those shows. And like most TV writers, Rhodes clearly prefers to imagine himself in the company of novelists.

"What novel is this that you are living in now and will exit from in eight months and be like, 'Oh, my God'?" I ask him.

"Who would be the author of this novel?" he asks.

"The one you are a character in now?"

"Don DeLillo, I think," Rhodes answers. "I don't know how you feel about Don DeLillo."

"I love Don DeLillo," I answer.

"Yeah," Rhodes answers. "That's the only person I can think of who has confronted these questions of, you know, the individual who finds himself negotiating both vast currents of history and a very specific kind of power dynamics. That's his milieu. And that's what it's like to work in the U.S. foreign-policy apparatus in 2016."

It has been rare to find Ben Rhodes's name in news stories about the large events of the past seven years, unless you are looking for the quotation from an unnamed senior official in Paragraph 9. He is invisible because he is not an egotist, and because he is devoted to the president. But once you are attuned to the distinctive qualities of Rhodes's voice — which is often laced with aggressive contempt for anyone or anything that stands in the president's way — you can hear him everywhere.

Rhodes's mother and father are not interested in talking about Rhodes. Neither is his older brother, David, who is president of CBS News, an organization that recently revived the effort to declassify the contents of the redacted 28 pages of the Sept. 11 report on the eve of Obama's visit to Saudi Arabia, on which Rhodes, as usual, accompanied the president. The brothers are close, but they often go months without seeing each other. "He was like the kid who carried the briefcase to school," Ben says of his brother, who worked at Fox News and Bloomberg before moving to CBS. "I actually didn't do that great in high school because I was drinking and smoking pot and hanging out in Central Park."

Rhodes's impassioned yet depressive vibe, which I feel in his stray remarks and in the strangeness of his decision to allow me to roam around the White House, stems in part from feeling overloaded; he wishes he had more time to think and write. His mother is Jewish from the Upper East Side, and worships John Updike, and reads The New Yorker. His father is a Texan lawyer who took his sons to St. Thomas Episcopal Church once a month, where Rhodes felt like the Jewish kid in church, the same way he felt like a "Jewish Christian" at Passover Seders. His New York City prep-school-kid

combination of vulnerability, brattiness and passionate hatred for phonies suggests an only slightly updated version of what Holden Caulfield might have been like if he grew up to work in the West Wing.

Rhodes's windowless back office, which doesn't have a TV screen, is an oasis of late-night calm in a building devoted to the performance of power. The walls are painted a soft creamy color, which gives it the feel of an upscale hotel room with the drapes closed. He arrives here every morning between 8 and 9 from a modest two-bedroom apartment in a grad-student-type building in an unpretentious Washington neighborhood around the corner from his favorite post-collegiate bar. Before coming to work, he walks his 1-year-old daughter to day care. Then he drives to work in his Beamer, which appears to be the one grown-up luxury he and his wife, Ann Norris, who works in the State Department and longs to return to her childhood home of California, can afford. When his wife takes the car, he rides the bus, which offers him a touch of the anonymity he craves. His days at the White House start with the president's daily briefing, which usually includes the vice president, National Security Adviser Susan Rice, Deputy National Security Adviser Avril Haines and Homeland Security Adviser Lisa Monaco.

The books on his shelves are a mix of DeLillo novels, history books, recondite tomes on Cuba and Burma and adventure-wonk stuff like Mark Mazzetti's "The Way of the Knife." C. S. Lewis makes an appearance here, alongside a volume of Lincoln speeches (Obama tells all his speechwriters to read Lincoln) and George Orwell's "All Art Is Propaganda." I have seen the same books on the shelves of plenty of Brooklyn apartments. Yet some large part of the recent history of America and its role in the world turns on the fact that the entirely familiar person sitting at the desk in front of me, who seems not unlike other weed-smokers I know who write Frederick Barthelme-type short stories, has achieved a "mind meld" with President Obama and used his skills to help execute a radical shift in American foreign policy.

So I wonder: How did he get from there to here?

The story that Rhodes published in The Beloit Fiction Journal is a good place to start.

The goldfish idea, I'm told, had been Ms. Wellberg's.
"Why?" I ask. She is dyed blond, slim, petite, attractive.
"You take meticulous notes," she slurs.

The editor at Foreign Policy who read "Goldfish," which Rhodes attached with his query letter, said that the young M.F.A. would be bored with fact-checking. Instead, he suggested that he apply for a job with Lee Hamilton, the onetime congressman from Indiana, who was looking for a speechwriter.

"I was surprised," Hamilton remembered. "What the hell does a guy who wanted to write fiction come to me for?" But he had always found writers useful, and Rhodes's writing sample was the best in the pile. So he hired him on at the Wilson Center, a nonpartisan think tank. Though Rhodes never said a word in meetings, Hamilton says, he had a keen understanding of what was going on and a talent for putting the positions of distinguished participants down on paper. "I immediately understood that it's a very important quality for a staffer," Hamilton explained, "that he could come into a meeting and decide what was decided." I suggested that the phrase "decide what was decided" is suggestive of the enormous power that might accrue to someone with Rhodes's gifts. Hamilton nodded. "Absolutely," he said.

The notes go on and on. They have ideas with subsets of ideas and reactions to ideas indented beneath the original ideas. The handwriting is perfect. The representation of what happened in the meetings immaculate, like a mirror's reflection after it has been scrubbed clean. I have a reputation for my notes.

Rhodes served as Hamilton's staff member on the 9/11 Commission, where he met Denis McDonough, another Hamilton protégé, who had gone on

to work for Tom Daschle in the Senate. Rhodes then became the chief note-taker for the Iraq Study Group, the bipartisan commission that excoriated George Bush's war in Iraq. He accompanied Hamilton and his Republican counterpart on the group, former secretary of state and Bush family intimate James Baker, to their meetings with Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Stephen Hadley, David Petraeus and many others (Vice President Dick Cheney met with the group but didn't say a word). According to both Hamilton and Edward Djerejian, Baker's second on the I.S.G., Rhodes's opinions were helpful in shaping the group's conclusions — a scathing indictment of the policy makers responsible for invading Iraq. For Rhodes, who wrote much of the I.S.G. report, the Iraq war was proof, in black and white, not of the complexity of international affairs or the many perils attendant on political decision-making but of the fact that the decision-makers were morons.

One result of this experience was that when Rhodes joined the Obama campaign in 2007, he arguably knew more about the Iraq war than the candidate himself, or any of his advisers. He had also developed a healthy contempt for the American foreign-policy establishment, including editors and reporters at The New York Times, The Washington Post, The New Yorker and elsewhere, who at first applauded the Iraq war and then sought to pin all the blame on Bush and his merry band of neocons when it quickly turned sour. If anything, that anger has grown fiercer during Rhodes's time in the White House. He referred to the American foreign-policy establishment as the Blob. According to Rhodes, the Blob includes Hillary Clinton, Robert Gates and other Iraq-war promoters from both parties who now whine incessantly about the collapse of the American security order in Europe and the Middle East.

> *Boost thinks very highly of me. My notes are so impressive that they have taken on the form of ideas, he feels. I capture other people's words in a manner that not only organizes them, but inserts a clarity and purpose that was not present in the original idea. Connections are made between two opposing ideas that were not apparent in the meeting. I have gotten at not only the representation of things, but the way that*

the mind actually works.

Jon Favreau, then the campaign's lead speechwriter, felt as if he could use a foreign-affairs expert who could write. "Foreign-policy advisers kept changing all the language that made Obama sound like he wasn't part of the Democratic foreign-policy establishment," he remembers. "The idea of someone with a masters in fiction who had also co-authored the Iraq Study Group and 9/11 Commission reports seemed perfect for a candidate who put so much emphasis on storytelling." The two young speechwriters quickly found themselves to be in sync. "He truly gives zero [expletive] about what most people in Washington think," Favreau says admiringly of Rhodes. "I think he's always seen his time there as temporary and won't care if he's never again invited to a cocktail party, or asked to appear on 'Morning Joe,' or inducted into the Council on Foreign Relations hall of fame or whatever the hell they do there."

I sit next to Boost in the meetings. The ideas fly like radio waves. I am silent in these meetings, taking notes.

"He was easily underestimatable," Samantha Power recalls, of Rhodes's arrival on the Obama campaign in 2007. Herself a writer, whose history of America's responses to genocide, "A Problem From Hell," won the Pulitzer Prize, Power went to work in Obama's Senate office in 2005. Power is now the American ambassador to the United Nations. Her attire suggests a disingenuous ambivalence about her role in government that appears to be common among her cohort in the Obama administration, with a cardigan made of thick, expensive-looking cashmere worn over a simple frock, along with silver spray-painted rock 'n' roll sneakers. See, I'm sympatico, the sneakers proclaim.

Early on, what struck her about Rhodes was how strategic he was. "He was leading quietly, initially, and mainly just through track changes, like what

to accept and reject," she says. When I ask her where Rhodes's control over drafts of the candidate's speeches came from, she immediately answers, "Obama," but then qualifies her answer. "But it was Hobbesian," she adds. "He had the pen. And he understood intuitively that having the pen gave him that control." His judgment was superior to that of his rivals, and he refused to ever back down. "He was just defiant," she recalls. "He was like: 'No, I'm not. That's bad. Obama wouldn't want that.' "

Obama relies on Rhodes for "an unvarnished take," in part, she says, because "Ben just has no poker face," and so it's easy to see when he is feeling uncomfortable. "The president will be like, 'Ben, something on your mind?' And then Ben will have this incredibly precise lay-down of why the previous half-hour has been an utter waste of time, because there's a structural flaw to the entire direction of the conversation."

The literary character that Rhodes most closely resembles, Power volunteers, is Holden Caulfield. "He hates the idea of being phony, and he's impetuous, and he has very strong views."

In Afghanistan the Taliban dynamites enormous statues of Buddha, the ancient material imploding and crumbling to the ground, small specks of men can be seen watching in the foreground. This is somewhere else. Far away.

On his first day in the West Wing, Rhodes remembers thinking how remarkably small the space was, and noticing that the same few dozen people he worked with at campaign headquarters in Chicago were now wearing suits instead of jeans. The enormousness of the endeavor sank in on that first day, and he realized that for all the prep work, there was no manual for how to be on the staff of the person who is running the country, particularly at a time when the global economy was in free fall and 180,000 Americans were fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. He became aware of two things at once: the weight of the issues that the president was confronted with, and the intense global

interest in even the most mundane presidential communications.

The job he was hired to do, namely to help the president of the United States communicate with the public, was changing in equally significant ways, thanks to the impact of digital technologies that people in Washington were just beginning to wrap their minds around. It is hard for many to absorb the true magnitude of the change in the news business — 40 percent of newspaper-industry professionals have lost their jobs over the past decade — in part because readers can absorb all the news they want from social-media platforms like Facebook, which are valued in the tens and hundreds of billions of dollars and pay nothing for the "content" they provide to their readers. You have to have skin in the game — to be in the news business, or depend in a life-or-death way on its products — to understand the radical and qualitative ways in which words that appear in familiar typefaces have changed. Rhodes singled out a key example to me one day, laced with the brutal contempt that is a hallmark of his private utterances. "All these newspapers used to have foreign bureaus," he said. "Now they don't. They call us to explain to them what's happening in Moscow and Cairo. Most of the outlets are reporting on world events from Washington. The average reporter we talk to is 27 years old, and their only reporting experience consists of being around political campaigns. That's a sea change. They literally know nothing."

In this environment, Rhodes has become adept at ventriloquizing many people at once. Ned Price, Rhodes's assistant, gave me a primer on how it's done. The easiest way for the White House to shape the news, he explained, is from the briefing podiums, each of which has its own dedicated press corps. "But then there are sort of these force multipliers," he said, adding, "We have our compadres, I will reach out to a couple people, and you know I wouldn't want to name them — "

"I can name them," I said, ticking off a few names of prominent Washington reporters and columnists who often tweet in sync with White House messaging.

Price laughed. "I'll say, 'Hey, look, some people are spinning this narrative that this is a sign of American weakness,' " he continued, "but — "

"In fact it's a sign of strength!" I said, chuckling.

"And I'll give them some color," Price continued, "and the next thing I know, lots of these guys are in the dot-com publishing space, and have huge Twitter followings, and they'll be putting this message out on their own."

This is something different from old-fashioned spin, which tended to be an art best practiced in person. In a world where experienced reporters competed for scoops and where carrying water for the White House was a cause for shame, no matter which party was in power, it was much harder to sustain a "narrative" over any serious period of time. Now the most effectively weaponized 140-character idea or quote will almost always carry the day, and it is very difficult for even good reporters to necessarily know where the spin is coming from or why.

When I later visited Obama's former campaign mastermind David Axelrod in Chicago, I brought up the soft Orwellian vibe of an information space where old media structures and hierarchies have been erased by Silicon Valley billionaires who convinced the suckers that information was "free" and everyone with access to Google was now a reporter. Axelrod, a former newspaperman, sighed. "It's not as easy as standing in front of a press conference and speaking to 70 million people like past presidents have been able to do," he said. The bully pulpit by and large doesn't exist anymore, he explained. "So more and more, over the last couple of years, there's been an investment in alternative means of communication: using digital more effectively, going to nontraditional sources, understanding where on each issue your constituencies are going to be found," he said. "I think they've approached these major foreign-policy challenges as campaign challenges, and they've run campaigns, and those campaigns have been very sophisticated."

Rhodes's innovative campaign to sell the Iran deal is likely to be a

model for how future administrations explain foreign policy to Congress and the public. The way in which most Americans have heard the story of the Iran deal presented — that the Obama administration began seriously engaging with Iranian officials in 2013 in order to take advantage of a new political reality in Iran, which came about because of elections that brought moderates to power in that country — was largely manufactured for the purpose for selling the deal. Even where the particulars of that story are true, the implications that readers and viewers are encouraged to take away from those particulars are often misleading or false. Obama's closest advisers always understood him to be eager to do a deal with Iran as far back as 2012, and even since the beginning of his presidency. "It's the center of the arc," Rhodes explained to me two days after the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, was implemented. He then checked off the ways in which the administration's foreign-policy aims and priorities converged on Iran. "We don't have to kind of be in cycles of conflict if we can find other ways to resolve these issues," he said. "We can do things that challenge the conventional thinking that, you know, 'AIPAC doesn't like this,' or 'the Israeli government doesn't like this,' or 'the gulf countries don't like it.' It's the possibility of improved relations with adversaries. It's nonproliferation. So all these threads that the president's been spinning — and I mean that not in the press sense — for almost a decade, they kind of all converged around Iran."

In the narrative that Rhodes shaped, the "story" of the Iran deal began in 2013, when a "moderate" faction inside the Iranian regime led by Hassan Rouhani beat regime "hard-liners" in an election and then began to pursue a policy of "openness," which included a newfound willingness to negotiate the dismantling of its illicit nuclear-weapons program. The president set out the timeline himself in his speech announcing the nuclear deal on July 14, 2015: "Today, after two years of negotiations, the United States, together with our international partners, has achieved something that decades of animosity has not." While the president's statement was technically accurate — there had in

fact been two years of formal negotiations leading up to the signing of the J.C.P.O.A. — it was also actively misleading, because the most meaningful part of the negotiations with Iran had begun in mid-2012, many months before Rouhani and the "moderate" camp were chosen in an election among candidates handpicked by Iran's supreme leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The idea that there was a new reality in Iran was politically useful to the Obama administration. By obtaining broad public currency for the thought that there was a significant split in the regime, and that the administration was reaching out to moderate-minded Iranians who wanted peaceful relations with their neighbors and with America, Obama was able to evade what might have otherwise been a divisive but clarifying debate over the actual policy choices that his administration was making. By eliminating the fuss about Iran's nuclear program, the administration hoped to eliminate a source of structural tension between the two countries, which would create the space for America to disentangle itself from its established system of alliances with countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel and Turkey. With one bold move, the administration would effectively begin the process of a large-scale disengagement from the Middle East.

The nerve center for the selling of the Iran deal to Congress, which took place in a concentrated three-month period between July and September of last year, was located inside the White House, and is referred to by its former denizens as "the war room." Chad Kreikemeier, a Nebraskan who had worked in the White House Office of Legislative Affairs, helped run the team, which included three to six people from each of several agencies, he says, which were the State Department, Treasury, the American delegation to the United Nations (i.e., Samantha Power), "at times D.O.D." (the Department of Defense) and also the Department of Energy and the National Security Council. Rhodes "was kind of like the quarterback," running the daily video conferences and coming up with lines of attack and parry. "He was extremely good about immediately getting to a phrase or a way of getting the message out that just made more sense," Kreikemeier remembers. Framing the deal as a

choice between peace and war was Rhodes's go-to move — and proved to be a winning argument.

The person whom Kreikemeier credits with running the digital side of the campaign was Tanya Somanader, 31, the director of digital response for the White House Office of Digital Strategy, who became known in the war room and on Twitter as @TheIranDeal. Early on, Rhodes asked her to create a rapid-response account that fact-checked everything related to the Iran deal. "So, we developed a plan that was like: The Iran deal is literally going to be the tip of everything that we stand up online," Somanader says. "And we're going to map it onto what we know about the different audiences we're dealing with: the public, pundits, experts, the right wing, Congress." By applying 21st-century data and networking tools to the white-glove world of foreign affairs, the White House was able to track what United States senators and the people who worked for them, and influenced them, were seeing online — and make sure that no potential negative comment passed without a tweet.

As she explained how the process worked, I was struck by how naïve the assumption of a "state of nature" must seem in an information environment that is mediated less and less by experienced editors and reporters with any real prior knowledge of the subjects they write about. "People construct their own sense of source and credibility now," she said. "They elect who they're going to believe." For those in need of more traditional-seeming forms of validation, handpicked Beltway insiders like Jeffrey Goldberg of The Atlantic and Laura Rozen of Al-Monitor helped retail the administration's narrative. "Laura Rozen was my RSS feed," Somanader offered. "She would just find everything and retweet it."

Rhodes's messaging campaign was so effective not simply because it was a perfectly planned and executed example of digital strategy, but also because he was personally involved in guiding the deal itself. In July 2012, Jake Sullivan, a close aide to Hillary Clinton, traveled to Muscat, Oman, for the first meeting with the Iranians, taking a message from the White House. "It was, 'We're

prepared to open a direct channel to resolve the nuclear agreement if you are prepared to do the same thing and authorize it at the highest levels and engage in a serious discussion on these issues,' " Sullivan remembers. "Once that was agreed to, it was quickly decided that we resolve the nuclear agreement in two steps, the interim agreement and the final agreement." Subsequent meetings with the Iranians followed, during which he was joined by Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns. "Bill and I had a huge amount of license to explore what the terms would look like, within the negotiating parameters," Sullivan says. "What the precise trade-offs would be, between forms of sanctions relief and forms of restraints on their programs, that was left to us to feel out."

The fact that the president largely let his surrogates do the talking and the selling of the Iran deal — and even now, rarely talks about it in public — does not reflect his level of direct engagement. Sullivan and Burns spent hours before and after every session in Oman with the president and his closest advisers in the White House. When the president wasn't present, Rhodes always was. "Ben and I, in particular, the two of us, spent a lot of time thinking through all the angles," Sullivan says. "We spent three, four, five hours together in Washington talking things through before the meetings." In March 2013, a full three months before the elections that elevated Hassan Rouhani to the office of president, Sullivan and Burns finalized their proposal for an interim agreement, which became the basis for the J.C.P.O.A.

The White House point person during the later stage of the negotiations was Rob Malley, a favored troubleshooter who is currently running negotiations that could keep the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad in power. During the course of the Iran talks, Malley told me, he always kept in close contact with Rhodes. "I would often just call him and say, 'Give me a reality check,' " Malley explained. "He could say, 'Here is where I think the president is, and here is where I think he will be.' " He continued, "Ben would try to anticipate: Does it make sense policywise? But then he would also ask himself: How do we sell it to Congress? How do we sell it to the public? What is it going

to do to our narrative?"

Malley is a particularly keen observer of the changing art of political communication; his father, Simon Malley, who was born in Cairo, edited the politics magazine Afrique Asie and proudly provided a platform for Fidel Castro and Yasir Arafat, in the days when the leaders' words might take weeks to travel from Cuba or Cairo to Paris. "The Iran experience was the place where I saw firsthand how policy, politics and messaging all had to be brought together, and I think that Ben is really at the intersection of all three," Malley says. "He reflects and he shapes at the same time."

As Malley and representatives of the State Department, including Wendy Sherman and Secretary of State John Kerry, engaged in formal negotiations with the Iranians, to ratify details of a framework that had already been agreed upon, Rhodes's war room did its work on Capitol Hill and with reporters. In the spring of last year, legions of arms-control experts began popping up at think tanks and on social media, and then became key sources for hundreds of often-clueless reporters. "We created an echo chamber," he admitted, when I asked him to explain the onslaught of freshly minted experts cheerleading for the deal. "They were saying things that validated what we had given them to say."

When I suggested that all this dark metafictional play seemed a bit removed from rational debate over America's future role in the world, Rhodes nodded. "In the absence of rational discourse, we are going to discourse the [expletive] out of this," he said. "We had test drives to know who was going to be able to carry our message effectively, and how to use outside groups like Ploughshares, the Iran Project and whomever else. So we knew the tactics that worked." He is proud of the way he sold the Iran deal. "We drove them crazy," he said of the deal's opponents.

Yet Rhodes bridled at the suggestion that there has been anything deceptive about the way that the agreement itself was sold. "Look, with Iran, in

a weird way, these are state-to-state issues. They're agreements between governments. Yes, I would prefer that it turns out that Rouhani and Zarif" — Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister — "are real reformers who are going to be steering this country into the direction that I believe it can go in, because their public is educated and, in some respects, pro-American. But we are not betting on that."

In fact, Rhodes's passion seems to derive not from any investment in the technical specifics of sanctions or centrifuge arrays, or any particular optimism about the future course of Iranian politics and society. Those are matters for the negotiators and area specialists. Rather, it derived from his own sense of the urgency of radically reorienting American policy in the Middle East in order to make the prospect of American involvement in the region's future wars a lot less likely. When I asked whether the prospect of this same kind of far-reaching spin campaign being run by a different administration is something that scares him, he admitted that it does. "I mean, I'd prefer a sober, reasoned public debate, after which members of Congress reflect and take a vote," he said, shrugging. "But that's impossible."

Getting Rhodes to speak directly about the man whose gestalt he channels is a bit like asking someone to look into a mirror while describing someone else's face. The Obama he talks about in public is, in part, a character that he has helped to create — based on a real person, of course — and is embedded in story lines that he personally constructs and manages. At the same time, he believes very deeply in Obama, the man and the president, and in the policies that he has helped to structure and sell on his behalf.

Obama's particular revulsion against a certain kind of global power politics is a product, Rhodes suggests, of his having been raised in Southeast Asia. "Indonesia was a place where your interaction at that time with power was very intimate, right?" Rhodes asks. "Tens or hundreds of thousands of people had just been killed. Power was not some abstract thing," he muses. "When we sit in Washington and debate foreign policy, it's like a Risk game, or

it's all about us, or the human beings disappear from the decisions. But he lived in a place where he was surrounded by people who had either perpetrated those acts — and by the way, may not have felt great about that — or else knew someone who was a victim. I don't think there's ever been an American president who had an experience like that at a young age of what power is."

The parts of Obama's foreign policy that disturb some of his friends on the left, like drone strikes, Rhodes says, are a result of Obama's particular kind of globalism, which understands the hard and at times absolute necessity of killing. Yet, at the same time, they are also ways of avoiding more deadly uses of force — a kind of low-body-count spin move.

He leans back and opens a drawer in the file cabinet behind his desk, and removes a folder. "I was going to show you something," he says, removing a sheaf of yellow legal paper covered in longhand. "Just to confirm for you that he really is a writer." He shows me the president's copy of his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, a revision of an original draft by Favreau and Rhodes whose defining tension was accepting a prize awarded before he had actually accomplished anything. In his longhand notes, Obama relocated the speech's tension in the fact that he was accepting a peace prize a week after ordering 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan. King and Gandhi were the author's heroes, yet he couldn't act as they did, because he runs a state. The reason that the author had to exercise power was because not everyone in the world is rational.

We sit for a while, and I examine the president's thoughts unfolding on the page, and the lawyerly, abstract nature of his writing process. "Moral imagination, spheres of identity, but also move beyond cheap lazy pronouncements," one note reads. Here was the new American self — rational, moral, not self-indulgent. No longer one thing but multiple overlapping spheres or circles. Who is described here? As usual, the author is describing himself.

Valerie Jarrett has been called the president's work wife and is the only member of the West Wing staff who knew Obama before he began contemplating a run for the presidency. What I want to understand better, I tell her, are the swirls of the president's emotional fingerprint, which I saw in the longhand draft of his Nobel speech. We talk for a while about being American and at the same time being from somewhere else, and the split-screen experience of reality that experience allows. Jarrett was born in Iran and spent her early childhood there.

"Was it a point of connection between you and the president that you had each spent some substantial part of your childhoods living in another country?" I ask. Her face lights up.

"Absolutely," she answers. The question is important to her. "The first conversation we had over dinner, when we first met, was about what it was like for both of us to live in countries that were predominantly Muslim countries at formative parts of our childhood and the perspective it gave us about the United States and how uniquely excellent it is," she says. "We talked about what it was like to be children, and how we played with children who had totally different backgrounds than our own but you would find something in common." She recalls her very first dinner together with the new fiancé of her protégée Michelle Robinson. "I remember him asking me questions that I felt like no one else has ever asked me before," she says, "and he asked me from a perspective of someone who knew the same experience that I had. So it felt really good. I was like, 'Oh, finally someone who gets it.' "

Barack Obama is not a standard-issue liberal Democrat. He openly shares Rhodes's contempt for the groupthink of the American foreign-policy establishment and its hangers-on in the press. Yet one problem with the new script that Obama and Rhodes have written is that the Blob may have finally caught on.

"He is a brilliant guy, but he has a real problem with what I call the

assignment of bad faith," one former senior official told me of the president. "He regards everyone on the other side at this point as being a bunch of bloodthirsty know-nothings from a different era who play by the old book. He hears arguments like, 'We should be punching Iran in the nose on its shipments of arms, and do it publicly,' or 'We should sanction the crap out of them for their ballistic-missile test and tell them that if they do it again we're going to do this or we're going to do that,' and he hears Dick Cheney in those arguments."

Another official I spoke to put the same point more succinctly: "Clearly the world has disappointed him." When I asked whether he believed that the Oval Office debate over Syria policy in 2012 — resulting in a decision not to support the uprising against Assad in any meaningful way — had been an honest and open one, he said that he had believed that it was, but has since changed his mind. "Instead of adjusting his policies to the reality, and adjusting his perception of reality to the changing realities on the ground, the conclusions he draws are exactly the same, no matter what the costs have been to our strategic interests," he says. "In an odd way, he reminds me of Bush." The comparison is a startling one — and yet, questions of tone aside, it is uncomfortably easy to see the similarities between the two men, American presidents who projected their own ideas of the good onto an indifferent world.

One of the few charter members of the Blob willing to speak on the record is Leon Panetta, who was Obama's head of the C.I.A. and secretary of defense and also enough of a product of a different culture to give honest answers to what he understands to be questions of consequence. At his institute at the old Fort Ord in Seaside, Calif., where, in the days before he wore Mr. Rogers sweaters, he served as a young Army intelligence officer, I ask him about a crucial component of the administration's public narrative on Iran: whether it was ever a salient feature of the C.I.A.'s analysis when he ran the agency that the Iranian regime was meaningfully divided between "hard-line" and

"moderate" camps.

"No," Panetta answers. "There was not much question that the Quds Force and the supreme leader ran that country with a strong arm, and there was not much question that this kind of opposing view could somehow gain any traction."

I ask Panetta whether, as head of the C.I.A., or later on, as secretary of defense, he ever saw the letters that Obama covertly sent to Khamenei, in 2009 and in 2012, which were only reported on by the press weeks later.

"No," he answers, before saying he would "like to believe" that Tom Donilon, national security adviser since 2010, and Hillary Clinton, then secretary of state, had a chance to work on the offer they presented.

As secretary of defense, he tells me, one of his most important jobs was keeping Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and his defense minister, Ehud Barak, from launching a pre-emptive attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. "They were both interested in the answer to the question, 'Is the president serious?' " Panetta recalls. "And you know my view, talking with the president, was: If brought to the point where we had evidence that they're developing an atomic weapon, I think the president is serious that he is not going to allow that to happen."

Panetta stops.

"But would you make that same assessment now?" I ask him.

"Would I make that same assessment now?" he asks. "Probably not."

He understands the president's pivot toward Iran as the logical result of a deeply held premise about the negative effects of use of American military force on a scale much larger than drone strikes or Special Forces raids. "I think the whole legacy that he was working on was, 'I'm the guy who's going to bring these wars to an end, and the last goddamn thing I need is to start another

war,' " he explains of Obama. "If you ratchet up sanctions, it could cause a war. If you start opposing their interest in Syria, well, that could start a war, too."

In Panetta's telling, his own experience at the Pentagon under Obama sometimes resembled being installed in the driver's seat of a car and finding that the steering wheel and brakes had been disconnected from the engine. Obama and his aides used political elders like him, Robert Gates and Hillary Clinton as cover to end the Iraq war, and then decided to steer their own course, he suggests. While Panetta pointedly never mentions Rhodes's name, it is clear whom he is talking about.

"There were staff people who put themselves in a position where they kind of assumed where the president's head was on a particular issue, and they thought their job was not to go through this open process of having people present all these different options, but to try to force the process to where they thought the president wanted to be," he says. "They'd say, 'Well, this is where we want you to come out.' And I'd say '[expletive], that's not the way it works. We'll present a plan, and then the president can make a decision.' I mean, Jesus Christ, it is the president of the United States, you're making some big decisions here, he ought to be entitled to hear all of those viewpoints and not to be driven down a certain path."

But that can't be true, I tell Panetta, because the aides he is talking about had no independent power aside from the authority that the president himself gave them.

"Well, that's a good question," Panetta allows. "He's a smart guy, he's not dumb." It's all part of the Washington blame game. Just as Panetta can blame young aides in order to avoid blaming the president for his actual choices, the president used his aides to tell Panetta to take a hike. Perhaps the president and his aides were continually unable to predict the consequences of their actions in Syria, and made mistake after mistake, while imagining that it was going to come out right the next time. "Another read, which isn't necessarily

opposed to that," I continue, "is that their actual picture is entirely coherent. But if they put it in blunt, unnuanced terms — "

Panetta completes my sentence: " — they'd get the [expletive] kicked out of them." He looks at me curiously. "Let me ask you something," he says. "Did you present this theory to Ben Rhodes?"

"Oh, God," Rhodes says. "The reason the president has bucked a lot of establishment thinking is because he does not agree with establishment thinking. Not because I or Denis McDonough are sitting here." He pushes back in his chair. "The complete lack of governance in huge swaths of the Middle East, that is the project of the American establishment," he declares. "That as much as Iraq is what angered me."

There is something dangerously naïve about this kind of talk, in which words like "balance," "stakeholders" and "interests" are endlessly reshuffled like word tiles in a magnetic-poetry set, with little regard for the immutable contingencies that shaped America's role in the world. But that's hardly fair. Ben Rhodes wanted to do right, and maybe, when the arc of history lands, it will turn out that he did. At least, he tried. Something scared him, and made him feel as if the grown-ups in Washington didn't know what they were talking about, and it's hard to argue that he was wrong.

What has interested me most about watching him and his cohort in the White House over the past seven years, I tell him, is the evolution of their ability to get comfortable with tragedy. I am thinking specifically about Syria, I add, where more than 450,000 people have been slaughtered.

"Yeah, I admit very much to that reality," he says. "There's a numbing element to Syria in particular. But I will tell you this," he continues. "I profoundly do not believe that the United States could make things better in Syria by being there. And we have an evidentiary record of what happens when we're there — nearly a decade in Iraq."

Iraq is his one-word answer to any and all criticism. I was against the Iraq war from the beginning, I tell Rhodes, so I understand why he perpetually returns to it. I also understand why Obama pulled the plug on America's engagement with the Middle East, I say, but it was also true as a result that more people are dying there on his watch than died during the Bush presidency, even if very few of them are Americans. What I don't understand is why, if America is getting out of the Middle East, we are apparently spending so much time and energy trying to strong-arm Syrian rebels into surrendering to the dictator who murdered their families, or why it is so important for Iran to maintain its supply lines to Hezbollah. He mutters something about John Kerry, and then goes off the record, to suggest, in effect, that the world of the Sunni Arabs that the American establishment built has collapsed. The buck stops with the establishment, not with Obama, who was left to clean up their mess.

It is clearly time for me to go. Rhodes walks me out into the sunlight of the West Wing parking lot, where we are treated to the sight of the aged Henry Kissinger, who has come to pay a visit. I ask Rhodes if he has ever met the famous diplomat before, and he tells me about the time they were seated together at a state dinner for the president of China. It was an interesting encounter to imagine, between Kissinger, who made peace with Mao's China while bombing Laos to bits, and Rhodes, who helped effect a similar diplomatic volte-face with Iran but kept the United States out of a civil war in Syria, which has caused more than four million people to become refugees. I ask Rhodes how it felt being seated next to the embodiment of American realpolitik. "It was surreal," he says, looking off into the middle distance. "I told him I was going to Laos," he continues. "He got a weird look in his eye."

There is nothing snarky about his delivery. Rhodes just was bothered by seeing legless kids and unexploded cluster bombs in the jungle. He is not Henry Kissinger, or so his logic runs, even as the underlying realist suspicion — or contempt — for the idea of America as a moral actor is eerily similar. He

is torn. As the president himself once asked, how are we supposed to weigh the tens of thousands who have died in Syria against the tens of thousands who have died in Congo? What power means is that the choice is yours, no matter who is telling the story.

David Samuels last wrote for the magazine about Susan Lindauer, an activist who tried to stop the Iraq war by serving as an intermediary between Saddam Hussein and George W. Bush.

A version of this article appears in print on May 8, 2016, on page MM44 of the Sunday Magazine with the headline: The Storyteller and the President.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 16, 2016

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Chaffetz:

I write in response to your request for the testimony of the Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor Benjamin Rhodes at a hearing of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform titled "White House Narratives on the Iran Deal." According to the invitation, the hearing "will examine the process by which the Administration negotiated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) ... [and] how the White House communicated about the JCPOA."

Throughout the congressional review period established by the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (INARA), and continuing through implementation of the JCPOA, Administration officials have engaged extensively with Congress. Over 30 times in the past year and a half, Administration officials have testified at open hearings and provided classified briefings to discuss the Iran deal and have provided in-depth information in both settings regarding the ways in which the JCPOA verifiably cuts off all of Iran's potential pathways to a nuclear weapon. Secretaries Kerry, Lew, and Moniz have provided classified briefings available to all House and Senate members on the JCPOA. In addition, the Administration has provided classified briefings open to all staff of the House and Senate with the necessary security clearances, in addition to numerous briefings hosted by individual committees. The President, Members of the Cabinet, and other officials have participated in hundreds of individual meetings and phone calls with members of the majority and minority in both chambers. The Administration is strongly committed to keeping Congress fully informed as implementation of the JCPOA continues, including a hearing in the Foreign Relations Committee last month and an upcoming hearing in the Banking Committee.

While the Administration will continue to consult closely with Congress on this important matter, testimony by one of the most senior advisers to the President raises significant constitutional concerns rooted in the separation of powers. Specifically, the appearance of a senior presidential adviser before Congress threatens the independence and autonomy of the President, as well as his ability to receive candid advice and counsel in the discharge of his constitutional duties. For these reasons, administrations of both parties have declined to make the President's closest advisers available to testify before Congress about their service to the President. Consistent with this practice, we will not make Mr. Rhodes available to testify.

Sincerely,

W. Neil Eggleston
Counsel to the President

cc: The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 16, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are deeply disturbed to read Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes's public admission to *The New York Times* that he spearheaded the charge to mislead elected lawmakers and the American people about the Iran nuclear deal and the negotiations that led to this agreement.

In "The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign-Policy Guru" (May 5, 2016), reporter David Samuels of *The New York Times* wrote how Mr. Rhodes created an "echo chamber" of sympathetic reporters and think-tanks to spread the misconception that the rise of so-called moderates in the Iranian regime led to talks for a nuclear deal when, in fact, "the most meaningful part of the negotiations with Iran had begun in mid-2012, many months before Rouhani and the 'moderate' camp were chosen in an election among candidates handpicked by Iran's supreme leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei." In addition, Mr. Rhodes showed alarming contempt for members of the news media whom he apparently sought to manipulate in his "echo chamber." "The average reporter we talk to is 27 years old, and their only reporting experience consists of being around political campaigns," Mr. Rhodes said, adding for good measure: "They literally know nothing."

What steps will your Administration take to restore the trust of the American public and members of the news media after Mr. Rhodes's admitted that he purposefully "created an echo chamber" during the debate over the Iran nuclear deal with the objective of propagating misconceptions and "saying things that validated what we [the Administration] had given them to say"?

Moreover, Mr. Rhodes repeatedly displayed an astonishing level of disrespect towards the U.S. Congress as he described his role in the important debate over the Iran nuclear deal's merits last year. He insultingly asserted that it was "impossible" for lawmakers elected by the American people to engage in "a sober, reasoned public debate, after which members of Congress reflect and take a vote." On the Administration's subsequent decision to engage in a strategy to mislead the American people, he said: "In the absence of rational discourse, we are going to discourse the [expletive] out of this."

Do you agree with Mr. Rhodes's contention that it is "impossible" for elected U.S. lawmakers to engage in a "sober, reasoned public debate" with your Administration over Iran or other issues

vital to America's security and prosperity? What steps will your Administration itself take to engage in rational discourse and repair damaged relations with the Congress?

We call on you to dismiss Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes before he further tarnishes the Office of President. While members of the Executive and Legislative branches may sometimes deeply disagree on issues of vital importance to our nation's security and prosperity, we should all agree, for the greater good of our Republic and the citizens whom we represent, to engage in our debates in a respectful, honest, and constructive manner. Mr. Rhodes's disrespectful, deceptive, and destructive conduct has fallen appallingly short of this standard, however. Indeed, if he had conducted himself this way in a typical place of business outside Washington, where American taxpayers work, he surely would have been already fired or asked to resign.

Sincerely,

Mark Kirk
United States Senator

John Cornyn
United States Senator

John Barrasso
United States Senator

IAEA
Atoms for Peace

Derestricted 19 January 2016
(This document has been derestricted at the meeting of the Board on 19 January 2016)

Board of Governors

GOV/INF/2016/1
Date: 16 January 2016

Original: English

For official use only

Verification and Monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015)

Report by the Director General

1. The Board of Governors has authorized the Director General to implement the necessary verification and monitoring of the Islamic Republic of Iran's (Iran's) nuclear-related commitments as set out in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and report accordingly, for the full duration of those commitments in light of United Nations Security Council (Security Council) resolution 2231 (2015).[1]

2. This report to the Board of Governors and in parallel to the Security Council is to confirm that the Agency has verified that Iran has taken the actions specified in paragraphs 15.1–15.11 of Annex V of the JCPOA.[2]

3. The Agency has verified and confirms that, as of 16 January 2016, Iran:

Arak Heavy Water Research Reactor (15.1)[3]

i. was not pursuing the construction of the existing IR-40 Reactor (Arak Heavy Water Research Reactor) based on its original design (JCPOA, Annex I – Nuclear-related measures, para.3);

ii. had removed the existing calandria from the IR-40 Reactor (para.3);

iii. had rendered the calandria inoperable by filling the openings in it with concrete, such that the Agency was able to verify that the calandria is not usable for a future nuclear application (para. 3);

iv. was not producing or testing natural uranium pellets, fuel pins or fuel assemblies specifically designed for the support of the IR-40 Reactor as originally designed (para. 10);

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[1] GOV/2015/53.

[2] Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015), para. 5.

[3] This numbering corresponds to the paragraphs of Annex V of the JCPOA.

v. had stored under continuous Agency monitoring all existing natural uranium pellets and fuel assemblies for the IR-40 Reactor (para. 10);

vi. had modified the fuel production process line at the Fuel Manufacturing Plant at Esfahan such that it cannot be used for the fabrication of fuel for the IR-40 Reactor as originally designed (para. 10);

Heavy Water Production Plant (15.2)

i. had no more than 130 metric tonnes of nuclear grade heavy water or its equivalent in different enrichments (para. 14);

ii. had informed the Agency about the inventory and the production of the Heavy Water Production Plant (HWPP) and was allowing the Agency to monitor the quantities of Iran's heavy water stocks and the amount of heavy water produced at the HWPP (para. 15);

Enrichment Capacity (15.3)

i. had no more than 5060 IR-1 centrifuges installed at the Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP) at Natanz in no more than 30 of the cascades in the configurations of the operating units at the time the JCPOA was agreed (para. 27);

ii. was not enriching uranium above 3.67% U–235 (para. 28) at any of its declared nuclear facilities;[4]

iii. had removed and stored in Hall B of FEP, under Agency continuous monitoring, all excess centrifuges and infrastructure not associated with the 5060 IR-1 centrifuges in FEP (para. 29), including all IR-2m centrifuges (para. 29.1), UF_6 pipework, and UF_6 withdrawal equipment from one of the withdrawal stations that was not in service at the time the JCPOA was agreed (para. 29.2);

Centrifuge Research and Development (15.4)

i. was not accumulating enriched uranium through its enrichment research and development (R&D) activities and its enrichment R&D with uranium was not being conducted using centrifuges other than IR-4, IR-5, IR-6 and IR-8 centrifuges (para. 32);

ii. was not conducting mechanical testing on more than two single centrifuges of type IR-2m, IR-4, IR-5, IR-6, IR-6s, IR-7 and IR-8 (para. 32);

iii. was not building or testing, with or without uranium, types of centrifuge other than those specified in the JCPOA (para. 32);

iv. had removed all of the centrifuges from the 164-machine IR-2m cascade and the 164-machine IR-4 cascade at PFEP and placed them in storage in Hall B of FEP in Natanz under Agency continuous monitoring (paras 33 and 34);

v. was testing centrifuges installed at PFEP within the limits set out in the JCPOA i.e. a single IR-4 machine (para. 35), a 10-machine IR-4 cascade (para. 35), a single IR-5 machine (para. 36), a single IR-6 machine and its intermediate cascades (para. 37);

vi. had yet to start testing its single IR-8 centrifuge (para. 38);

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[4] As of 16 January 2016, Iran was not enriching UF_6 at FEP.

vii. had recombined the streams from the R&D cascades at PFEP through the use of welded pipework in a manner that precludes the withdrawal of the enriched and depleted uranium material produced (para. 39);

viii. was, in relation to its declared nuclear facilities, testing centrifuges using uranium only at PFEP and conducting all mechanical testing of centrifuges only at PFEP and the Tehran Research Centre (para. 40);

ix. had removed to Hall B of FEP in Natanz under Agency continuous monitoring all centrifuges at PFEP, except those needed for testing as described in the relevant paragraphs above, and those in Cascade 1 at PFEP; had rendered inoperable Cascade 1 by, inter alia, removing the rotors, injecting epoxy resin into the pipework and removing the electrical systems (para. 41);

x. had stored all the IR-1 centrifuges previously installed in Cascade 6 at PFEP, and their associated infrastructure, in Hall B of FEP in Natanz under Agency continuous monitoring (para. 41); and was keeping the space in this line empty for R&D (para. 41);

xi. was maintaining the cascade infrastructure for testing single centrifuges and small and intermediate cascades in two R&D lines (nos. 2 and 3); and had adapted two other R&D lines (nos. 4 and 5) through the requisite removal of existing infrastructure (para. 42);

Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (15.5)

i. was not conducting any uranium enrichment or related R&D at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP) (para. 45);

ii. had removed all nuclear material from FFEP (para. 45);

iii. was maintaining no more than 1044 IR-1 centrifuges at FFEP, which were all in one wing (para. 46);

iv. had modified for the production of stable isotopes two of the cascades at FFEP that had never experienced UF_6 by removing the connection to the UF_6 feed main header; and had moved cascade UF_6 pipework to storage in Fordow under continuous Agency monitoring (para. 46.1);

v. was maintaining two cascades in an idle state and two cascades spinning, and had removed pipework that enables crossover tandem connections for these four cascades (para. 46.2);

vi. had removed from the aforementioned wing two other cascades by removing the IR-1 centrifuges and associated cascade UF_6 pipework (para. 47.1);

vii. had removed from the other wing of FFEP all IR-1 centrifuges and related uranium enrichment infrastructure, including pipework, and feed and withdrawal stations (para. 48.1);

Other Aspects of Enrichment (15.6)

i. had provided the Agency with Iran's long-term enrichment and R&D enrichment plan which is to be part of Iran's initial declaration described in Article 2 of the Additional Protocol (para. 52);

ii. had provided the Agency with a template for describing different centrifuge types (IR-1, IR-2m, IR-4, IR-5, IR-6, IR-6s, IR-7, IR-8) and associated definitions that have been agreed with JCPOA participants (para. 54);

iii. had agreed with the JCPOA participants a procedure for measuring IR-1, IR-2m and IR-4 centrifuge performance data (para. 55);

Uranium Stocks and Fuels (15.7)

i. had a stockpile of no more than 300 kg of UF_6 enriched up to 3.67% U–235 (or the equivalent in different chemical forms), as a result of either downblending to natural uranium, or sale and delivery out of Iran (para. 57);

ii. had fabricated into fuel plates for the Tehran Research Reactor,[5] transferred out of Iran or diluted to an enrichment level of 3.67% U–235 or less, all uranium oxide enriched to between 5% and 20% U–235 (para. 58);

Centrifuge Manufacturing (15.8)

i. was not producing IR-1 centrifuges to replace damaged or failed machines, as its stock of such centrifuges was in excess of 500 (para. 62);

Transparency Measures (15.9)

i. had completed the modalities and facility-specific arrangements to allow the Agency to implement all transparency measures provided for in Annex I of the JCPOA (see para. 4 below);

Additional Protocol and Modified Code 3.1 (15.10)

i. had notified the Agency pursuant to paragraph 64, Section L of Annex I of the JCPOA that, effective on Implementation Day, Iran will provisionally apply the Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement in accordance with Article 17(b) of the Additional Protocol (para. 64);

ii. had notified the Agency pursuant to paragraph 65, Section L of Annex I of the JCPOA that, effective on Implementation Day, Iran will fully implement the modified Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements to Iran's Safeguards Agreement as long as the Safeguards Agreement remains in force (para. 65);

Centrifuge Component Manufacturing Transparency (15.11)

i. had provided to the Agency an initial inventory of all existing centrifuge rotor tubes and bellows and permitted the Agency to verify this inventory by item counting and numbering, and through containment and surveillance (para. 80.1); and

ii. had declared to the Agency all locations and equipment that are used for the production of centrifuge rotor tubes or bellows and permitted the Agency to implement continuous monitoring of this equipment (para. 80.2).

4. In addition, the Agency also confirms that, as of 16 January 2016, Iran:

Modern Technologies and Long-Term Presence of the Agency

a) had permitted the Agency to use on-line enrichment measurement devices and electronic seals which communicate their status within nuclear sites to Agency inspectors (para. 67.1);

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[5] As of 16 January 2016, all fuel assemblies and fuel plates fabricated for use in the Tehran Research Reactor had been irradiated.

b) had facilitated the automated collection of Agency measurement recordings registered by installed measurement devices (para. 67.1);

c) had made the necessary arrangements to allow for a long-term Agency presence, including issuing long-term visas, as well as by providing proper working space for the Agency at nuclear sites and, with best efforts, at locations near nuclear sites in Iran (para. 67.2);

Transparency Related to Uranium Ore Concentrate

a) had permitted the Agency to monitor through measures agreed with Iran, including containment and surveillance, that all uranium ore concentrate (UOC) produced in Iran or obtained from any other source is transferred to the Uranium Conversion Facility in Esfahan (para. 68);

b) had provided the Agency with all information necessary to enable the Agency to verify the production of UOC and the inventory of UOC produced in Iran or obtained from any other source (para. 69); and

Transparency Related to Enrichment

a) had permitted the Agency to have regular access to relevant buildings at Natanz, including all of FEP and PFEP, and daily access upon request (para. 71).

Statement for the Record from Rep. John J. Duncan (TN-02)
Iran Narrative Hearing
May 17, 2015

Any high ranking administration official whether Democrat or Republican should be fired if they intentionally lie to or deceive the Congress or the American People on a major policy initiative.

This administration obviously misled the Congress and the American people about Obamacare and apparently about the Iran nuclear agreement.

Ben Rhodes has either refused or has not been allowed to come testify before this Committee about his actions regarding the Iran agreement.

He should be ashamed of himself or at the very least embarrassed about what he has done and how he very arrogantly bragged about it to the New York Times. Amazingly, if he is not embarrassed over his actions, his superiors in the White House are obviously, because they otherwise would have allowed Mr. Rhodes to testify today as other officials from every administration have done so on all major issues.

Many people believe before the U.S. went to war in Iraq, there was a delicate balance of power between Iran and Iraq, and while Saddam Hussein had many bad qualities, he did at least keep Iran in check.

However, when Saddam was toppled, it made Iran more powerful throughout the Middle East.

In addition, disbanding the Iraqi army in the way it was done at the beginning of the second Iraq war led to the creation of ISIL according to many experts.

I am one of the very few Members left in the present Congress who was in office during the Gulf War under the first President Bush. I voted for the first Gulf War in 1991 after attending briefings by Gen. Colin Powell, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf and other high-ranking officials which made Saddam Hussein sound like the second-coming of Hitler.

I then watched Hussein's so-called "elite" troops surrender to CNN camera crews or empty tanks. I realized then that the threat had been greatly exaggerated.

Just before the second Iraq war vote, I read everything I possibly could on the situation. Fortune Magazine had an article entitled, "We win – what then?" and said another war in Iraq would make American soldiers "sitting ducks for Islamic terrorists." U.S. News & World Report had an article entitled "Why the Rush to War." Because it was obvious that some of our top leaders were eager to go to war.

Because of my experiences on the two Iraq wars, I then read everything I could on the Iran Nuclear Agreement. Many respected leaders on both sides of the aisle favored the agreement such as former Senator George Mitchell, Brent Scowcroft, and many others. I also became aware of polls that suggested a slight majority of U.S. Jews favored the agreement. All of this gave me very mixed feelings.

I ended up voting against the agreement for reasons that are stated in the attached column that I wrote for the Knoxville News-Sentinel following that vote.

In spite of my vote, I believe at this point, since the U.S. government did enter into the agreement, and no actual violations have been proven up until now, I think peace requires we at least give this agreement a chance to work.

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