

Marcus Sheff: Once again, the P5+1 nations are meeting Iran for talks, this time in Vienna with an Iran-IAEA round of negotiations slated for Wednesday. The gathering aims to lay out how to implement the November 24th interim deal between Iran and the P5+1. Much of the political action is taking place in Washington D.C.'s halls of power with President Obama engaged in a battle royale with those calling for more sanctions against Iran at this crucial time. Our on-record guest today is the Republican Congressman from Illinois, Peter Roskam, who serves as Chief Deputy Whip and chair of the House Republican Israel Caucus. Congressman Roskam is a major player in the efforts to persuade the Senate to pass the House-approved Iran sanctions package. In a few moments, your questions, but first Congressman Roskam's opening remarks. Sir, over to you.

Rep. Peter Roskam: Thank you very much and thank you for the invitation to participate with you. It's difficult to imagine a season that is more complicated or a consequential decision that will have more of an impact, but the Obama administration has come upon one. The false premise of this negotiation with Iran is that there is such a thing as a peaceful Iranian nuclear ambition. There is not one. And, the idea of chasing one is an illusion and it's a deception on the part of the Iranians. I think the weakness of this deal is that it begins a very subtle slide from a policy of prevention, which has been the stated policy of the United States and the West to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power, to a policy of containment. And this is where this shift is now starting. My fear is that in the months and years ahead, we'll look back and say that was a time when the Iranians were given the imprimatur of approval of a so-called peaceful nuclear ambition. That was a time of great deception and it was one that the Obama administration fell for. As you know, the House has already acted. It acted in July of this year to enhance sanctions. It is incumbent now upon the United States Senate to take up that sanctions bill to press further. And the proof is that the sanctions are working. The sanctions have brought the Iranians to the table. The only other time that the Iranians slowed in their ambition was when the United States went to war in Iraq, this is now a second time that they proposed to slow down and it's because the sanctions are working. Because they're working, they should be made tighter and stronger. As one of my Democratic colleagues, the point he made on the floor during the special order, he said "look, sanctions is about momentum and the ability to create a sanctions operation to isolate the Iranian regime is one that is incredible significant, but it benefits from momentum. To slow up on the momentum in the hopes of an illusory promise from Iran is to make a very grievous error." So it's a mistake. We ought not to be complicit with this, we need to press forward with more sanctions. So with that, as we say, I yield back.

Marcus Sheff: Thank you very much sir. Just before I go into the questions submitted, I'm just wondering, can you explain the process, what happens from now if you are to be successful?

Rep. Peter Roskam: Well what would happen from now is that the Senate would take up the House version of the sanctions language that passed in July. The Senate would debate it and the Senate would pass it and then put it on President Obama's desk. Then he would either sign it or veto it and then we would have that next fight to try and override a presidential veto. I think that would be incredibly consequential. And, while it's difficult to override presidential vetoes, remember that the language that passed the House, passed with 400 votes in a House of Representatives that has a very difficult time agreeing on almost anything else.

Marcus Sheff: If President Obama did not veto, would that, in effect, nullify the interim agreement because it does say that America would act to reduce sanctions?

Rep. Peter Roskam: I do think, yeah clearly, so the question then becomes, well, how does a co-equal branch of government act when one branch of government makes a mistake? Do you become complicit in it and enable it, or do you push back? And my argument is that – that the Congress is a co-equal branch and Congress has a voice and has some authority in foreign policy and the administration did this without consulting Congress. So that...all of those factors, not the least of which is, the merit of a stronger policy, I think overrides the other consideration.

Marcus: Ok, thanks for that; let's look at a few of the questions. Even Prime Minister Netanyahu says talks are preferable to military action. So aren't increased sanctions just going to increase the likelihood of war?

Rep. Peter Roskam: I agree that talks are better than military action and I reject the idea that those are the only choices. The fact is that the talks have become more productive because of strengthening sanctions and then it argues significantly that talks would become even more fruitful if the Iranians felt more pressure. Because right now the Iranians are getting the benefit, they're getting the benefit of between 4 and 7 billion dollars in cash in the next six months, and they're also getting the benefit of an imprimatur of approval. They're giving up absolutely nothing. At the very least, they're pausing something. But they're giving up absolutely nothing. So if...if the big concern is Iran weaponizing, this continues the march to Iranian weaponization, and it does nothing to stop it.

Marcus: We've seen a divided Congress on so many issues. And yet, here in the case of Iran, it appears as though there really is bipartisan consensus. What is it that differentiates this from other issues?

Rep. Peter Roskam: Other issues tend to be, um, philosophical issues regarding spending and so forth – those sort of priorities, there's a wide range of views in the United States. But it's a very old story dealing with tyrants, and enabling tyrants, and then being surprised when tyrants come to power. There's an ability now, and I think the Obama administration should take a cue from a united Congress, that has a very difficult time uniting on other issues, has come together and is very clear that these sanctions must proceed, must get stronger, in hopes of driving real change in Iranian behavior, as opposed to just cosmetic change.

Marcus Sheff: Since the Geneva deal is a fact (excuse me), is a fact, what specific outcomes do you want to see from the agreement? And what steps do you think your government should be taking to ensure that its Middle East partners will see enough transparency, so that they're not just reassured but can sleep at night?

Rep. Peter Roskam: Well, so then this gets to, you jump down the track. In other words, should Congress take something up now, in light of the action of the Obama administration, to have an influence on the final deal? And there's a strong argument to be made for that. I think some of the things that need to be in place – it's gotta, um, you know, we need to make sure that we end Iran's development of ballistic missiles, for example. And we've got to make sure that its support for terrorism ends. And these incredible human rights abuses come to an end. Also, the goal should be to have the release of at least the three Americans who are, um, held captive right now. So these are some of the areas where I think the Obama administration should be focusing in any subsequent discussion.

Marcus Sheff: A couple more questions with your permission.

Rep. Peter Roskam: Sure.

Marcus Sheff: Thank you. At the end of the day, even if the U.S. ratchets up sanctions, can't Iran bypass the U.S. and deal with the rest of the world?

Rep. Peter Roskam: Well, here's the irony. The United States has positioned itself as the leader on this, and has been able to bring along many other nations that were reluctant to participate in the sanctions. So with that kind of real leadership, and real authority, why in the world would – would the Obama administration choose to squander that, and to give it up? So as I mentioned before, this notion of Iranian, or this notion of sanctions being something significant, um, significant in the momentum that it takes to create them – it's, it is a mistake for just that point. Because it signals that there will be future opportunities to do business with Iran. And what could happen is that other nations begin to position themselves to take advantage of that, as opposed to coming alongside to isolate the Iranians.

Marcus Sheff: I guess to some extent you've already hinted at the answer to this final question, but still. Let's say Senate agrees that, President Obama agrees that sanctions are implemented. At what point should the sanctions then be eased?

Rep. Peter Roskam: The point at which the sanctions should be eased is the point at which the Iranians abandon a nuclear ambition. That's the point. And this is not an attempt to keep any nation from flourishing, or any nation from thriving, or any nation from ascending. But those nations that made it – made it very clear that their purpose is destruction, that they are unambiguous in their intentions for using something – those nations need to be stopped. So we need to use the, the example of North Korea, back in the middle part of the last decade. We were told that there was a deal and all was well. And it turns out that it was a false claim, that the North Koreans manipulated the world, and now North Korea is a nuclear power very dangerous to contend with. We ought not make the same mistake, which it's so recent for, as we're dealing with Iran.

Marcus Sheff: And that's all we have time for this time around. Our thanks, of course, to all of you for participating. And, of course, to Illinois Republican Congressman and Chief Deputy Whip Peter Roskam. Thank you, sir, for your time.

Rep. Peter Roskam: Thank you very much.