

Iran's Missile Proliferation: A Conversation with Special Envoy Brian Hook

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TRANSCRIPT

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JOHN WALTERS: Welcome to the Betsy Wally Stern Policy Center here at Hudson Institute. I'm John Walters, the chief operating officer of Hudson. I'm delighted to welcome Mr. Brian Hook to Hudson Institute. And I'd like to thank my colleague, Rebeccah Heinrichs, for putting together such an important and timely event. And I'd like to thank Mr. Hook, of course, for sharing his time and expertise with us this morning. Iran has been arguably the most destabilizing force in the Middle East and in South Asia, threatening Americans, our allies and our interests. And from Israel to Syria to Iraq to Afghanistan, Iran remains a leading state sponsor of terrorism, responsible for the deaths of hundreds of American service members. Hudson Institute has worked to offer strategic policy recommendations for addressing the Iranian regime and the threats it poses. Today, we examine the threat posed by the - by Iran's missile proliferation.

We welcome to Hudson Institute Mr. Brian Hook, senior policy adviser Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and recently named special representative for Iran. Mr. Hook will lead the Iran Action Group to coordinate the State Department's pressure campaign on Iran. Previously, he founded an international strategic consulting firm based in Washington, D.C., held senior positions in the George W. Bush administration as assistant secretary of state for international organizations, senior adviser to U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, special assistant to the president for policy in the White House chief of staff's office and counsel in the office of legal policy at the Justice Department. Before that, he practiced corporate law. Please join me in thanking him for his service and welcome him and Rebeccah, my colleague here at Hudson who has written widely on security threats, especially proliferation and missile defense. I want to, again, thank her, and I want to thank him for the time they're spending with us this morning on this issue. Thank you both.

REBECCAHEINRICHES: Thank you, John. Thank you all for joining us this morning. And I would like to thank my friend Mr. Hook for being here to share with him - share with us his perspective on the issues. What we're going to do this morning is Brian is going to deliver his remarks, and then Brian is going to have a seat again, and then he and I are going to engage in conversation. And we will take some questions from the audience, but for those of you who do have questions, if you could please raise your hand and write them down on a piece of paper here that will be passed around by my colleagues, and then whenever I signal to him, he'll go ahead and collect those. And then I will ask a couple of questions from that stack. And then we will get everybody out of here right on time. And with that, Brian, the floor is yours.

BRIAN HOOK: Great, thanks. I'd like to thank the Hudson Institute for hosting me today. And I want to especially thank Rebeccah for extending this invitation. As many of you know, Rebeccah is a thought leader on nonproliferation and national security issues. I've had the opportunity to work with her and with the Hudson Institute over many years. And so it's a real honor for me to be invited to give a speech on Iran's missile program. When the president first directed his administration to address the Iran deal's serious flaws in October 2017, he identified three key deficiencies - the sunset clauses, the inspections regime and, quote, "near total silence on Iran's missile program." This last issue, Iran's missile program, is what I want to discuss with you today. Iran has the largest ballistic missile force in the Middle East with more than 10 ballistic missile systems in its inventory or in development. Its ballistic missile program remains among the most significant challenges to broader nonproliferation efforts in the region. And it's an enduring threat to our allies and partners, including Israel. As Secretary Pompeo said in his speech announcing our new Iran strategy in May, Iran must end its proliferation of ballistic missiles and halt further launching or development of nuclear-capable missile systems. History tells us clearly that advancements in ballistic missile systems often go hand in hand with the development of nuclear weapons. Since ballistic missiles are the most likely way that Iran would deliver a nuclear warhead is this administration has been firm on its position that the nuclear issue has to be addressed together with Iran's missile proliferation. But the JCPOA, also known as the Iran nuclear deal, separated these two issues. It removed Iran's missile development from the equation and focused on restraining one facet of proliferation at the expense of another. This was among the deal's key shortcomings and one of the reasons why the president decided to end our participation in it. The deal failed to protect the American people, in part because it failed to address Iran's dangerous spread of missiles across the Middle East.

However, this was not always the case. Prior to the Iran deal, the international community agreed that the best way to constrain Iran's nuclear threat was to also address its long-range ballistic missile capabilities. This is why the U.N. Security Council took action in 2010 to target development of Iran's ballistic missiles. Security Council Resolution 1929 prohibits Iran under Chapter VII from, quote, "undertaking any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using ballistic missile technology. Even with this prohibition, Iran

proceeded to conduct multiple ballistic missile launches from 2010 to 2016 in clear violation of international law. But the message sent by the international community was nonetheless clear. Iran cannot be allowed to advance its nuclear program at the same time that it is developing ballistic missile capabilities. The Iran deal undermined this international consensus. The deal itself failed to include any language constraining Iran's ballistic missile program. It gave the regime sanctions relief while allowing it to continue and develop and refine its arsenal. Worse yet, the international community backpedaled on the consensus that Iran's missiles and nukes should go hand in hand.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2231, which formally endorsed the Iran deal and superseded Resolution 1929, contained diluted language that came as welcome news to the Iranians. They lobbied hard for it. As the resolution now states, Iran is simply called upon not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons. Let me translate this. The international community kindly calls upon the Islamic Republic, the world's leading state sponsor of terror, to please refrain from bad behavior. But if kind words and good faith worked with the Iranian regime, we would have settled this issue long ago. The new language is hardly a clear and enforceable prohibition, and the Iranians have exploited this ambiguity ever since. Take, for example, in July 2017 when Iran tested a Simorgh space launch vehicle. The U.S., France, Germany and the U.K. all assessed that the launch violated Resolution 2231 because space launch vehicles use similar technology as intercontinental ballistic missiles. When we took our concerns to the U.N., the Russians were more than happy to point out that Resolution 2231, quote, "contained only a call," which by all means was not a prohibition to refrain from activities related to ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

The reality that U.N. member states ignore at their peril is that Iran has continued to develop and test ballistic missiles. In fact - and let me be clear about this - the Iran - the Iran's pace of missiles did not diminish after the Iran deal was implemented in January of 2016. Iran has conducted multiple ballistic missile launches since that time. We assess that in January 2017, Iran launched a medium-range missile believed to be the Khorramshahr. This missile is designed to carry a payload greater than 500 kilograms and could be used to carry nuclear warheads. Its suspected range also approaches 2,000 kilometers, which is far enough to target some European capitals. The Islamic Republic maintains the largest underground facility program in the Middle East. It is underground to protect and conceal many aspects of its missile program. In 2016, Iran unveiled two new short-range ballistic missiles, which it claims are capable of striking targets between 500 and 700 kilometers. Tehran also claims it is pursuing long-range precision-guided missiles, cruise missiles, which will present an increased threat to our allies in the region. Iran is also in the business of supplying missiles to its proxies in the Middle East. As I'm sure you have seen, recent media reports have suggested that Iran is transferring ballistic missiles to Shia militias in Iraq.

These claims are all the more serious when you take into account the life-threatening and provocative attacks on U.S. facilities recently in Baghdad and Basra, which Iran did nothing to stop. As the president has said, the United States will hold the regime in Tehran accountable for any attack that results in injury to our personnel or damage to United States government facilities. America will respond swiftly and decisively in defense of American lives. In Lebanon, we have evidence Iran is helping Hezbollah build missile production facilities. There is also mounting evidence that Iran is providing ballistic missile technology to the Houthis in Yemen. Analysis of debris recovered from a November 2017 strike close to the international airport in Riyadh indicates that the missile was of Iranian origin. A company logo with the letters S-B-I, which is - which matches that of the Iranian company Shahid Bagheri, indicates - Industries - is written on the missile. As U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley said in response to the attack, imagine if this missile had been launched at Dulles Airport or JFK or the airports in Paris, London or Berlin. This is the kind of activity that Iran is supporting, and it is continuing to support every day. And so what is the United States and its allies doing to address it? For starters, we ended the practice of simply admiring the problem. Secretary Pompeo launched a multipronged pressure campaign that reflects the president's goal of protecting the American people and our allies from this outlaw regime.

First, we are using the full scope of our sanctions authorities to inflict real costs on Iran's ballistic missile program. In March 2017 and April 2018, the U.S. imposed sanctions against a total of 19 foreign entities for transferring equipment to Iran's missile program. In July 2017, we designated 18 entities and individuals under Executive Order 13382 for supporting Iran's ballistic missile program or otherwise facilitating the regime's military procurement. In January of 2018, we designated four additional entities in connection with Iran's ballistic missile program under the same executive order. In May of 2018, we designated five Iranian individuals for providing ballistic-missile-related technical expertise to the Houthis. The individuals were also responsible for transferring weapons to Yemen on behalf

of the IRGC's Quds Force. While we are sanctioning Iran's missile activity, our economic pressure is much broader. The U.S. is reimposing sanctions that were lifted or waived as part of the nuclear deal. The first of these went into effect on August 7 and the remainder will be imposed on November 4 - 5. We intend to get global Iranian crude oil imports as close to zero as possible by November 4 to deny the regime revenue to fund its foreign adventurism. As part of our campaign to stop the Iranian regime's funding of terrorism, we also jointly disrupted with the UAE a currency exchange network that was transferring millions of dollars to the Quds Force. Regime leaders should feel the painful consequences for their violence, bad decision-making and corruption. Our aggressive reimposition of sanctions is aimed at forcing Iran to choose whether it should cease its destabilizing activities or face growing economic pressure and diplomatic isolation.

Second, we are working multilaterally to constrain Iran's missile program and bring allies and partners on board our campaign. We are coordinating with allies to interdict missile-related transfers and target Iranian missile proliferation activities in third countries. We understand the need to strengthen deterrence in the region to dissuade Iran from spreading its missile threat. We also participate in the Missile Technology Control Regime and The Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation to target Iran's missile development programs, choke checkpoint technologies and procurement strategies and depress countries to take steps to impede Iran's acquisition of missile technology. Many other nations already have common understandings of the threat that Iran poses beyond its nuclear aspirations. And I think this is clear in our negotiations with allies before the president decided to leave the Iran nuclear deal. We want more nations to join us in confronting the array of Iran's malign activity. We are asking every nation that can no longer tolerate Iran's destructive behavior to protect its people by joining us.

Finally, while not directly related to the missile issue, another critical component of our pressure campaign is Secretary Pompeo's commitment to exposing the regime's brutality and standing with the Iranian people. The Iranian people themselves deserve to know the high level of self-interest that fuels the regime's actions. And we continue to say that the longest-suffering victims of the Iranian regime are the Iranian people. We will continue to expose the regimes corrupt monopolies, malign activities, crooked self-dealings and outright oppression. As the secretary did during his trip to the Reagan Library, he will continue to engage with the Iranian diaspora. Secretary Pompeo's goal is a comprehensive deal with Iran that addresses the full scope of its destabilizing behavior. We ask the Islamic Republic to behave like a normal country so that it can enjoy the privileges of a normal country. With regard to missiles, this means returning to the pre-Iran nuclear deal consensus. Iran's nuclear proliferation and development of ballistic missiles must be addressed together, not separately. Placing temporary limits on Iran's nuclear program while allowing the regime to develop and proliferate ballistic missiles is a failed policy that the world cannot continue. It is time for all nations to join us in holding Iran to a new level of accountability for its destructive behavior, especially its lawless pursuit of ballistic missiles. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

HEINRICH: Thank you. Thank you all for your patience for that. So Brian, thank you so much for those remarks. I think the - one of the things I think you said, possibly the most interesting thing that you said - one of the most interesting things you said - was that the Iran deal, which is supposed to have a moderating effect on the regime, in fact did not have a moderating effect on the regime. And the missile activity in particular was something that did not seem to be fazed by the Iran deal. And that was one of the criticisms from those of us who were concerned about the Iran deal was that because the missile program and the nuclear program - they went hand in glove, and so even if the Iranians abided by the Iran deal, they could continue their missile program. And if they broke out of the Iran deal, or if they cheated, they could then marry it with a delivery system. I don't know if you had anything else you wanted to comment on that. But it was interesting to me that it - that we did not see a change in that, in their behavior, under the JCPOA.

HOOK: Rebeccah's exactly right. Iran's pace of missile launches did not diminish after implementation of the JCPOA. And they have - they've conducted multiple ballistic missile launches since implementation of the Iran nuclear deal. And when you look at the deal, it says very clearly that the deal is designed to contribute to not only regional peace and stability, but international peace and stability. And I don't think anyone can argue that the Middle East is more stable since the time that the Iran nuclear deal was implemented. Iran has been engaging in its sort of unique brand of sectarianism and violence and exporting revolution around the Middle East through Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain. And in some strange way, Iran's compliance with the Iran nuclear deal, which is at admittedly a low bar -

compliance with that deal somehow became like a seal of approval that Iran was fine in all the other non-nuclear categories. But when you look across the threat matrix that Iran presents, especially in missiles, it has done nothing to diminish the pace of their missile launches.

HEINRICHES: And then talk a little bit about ally cooperation, and in particular, just if you could touch on little bit Arab ally cooperation and what they see and view and understand is the problem. Obviously you mentioned the Saudis in particular are feeling the effects of Iranian missile proliferation. And then if you could touch on a little bit about where we are with our European allies and their understanding of this problem.

HOOK: When you look at the number of missiles that have been launched from Yemen inside of Saudi Arabia, this is - especially when one lands right there in the Riyadh airport, this is truly a threat to international peace and security. As I said earlier, imagine if one of those missiles have been aimed at Dulles or JFK or Charles de Gaulle or Heathrow. This is very dangerous work that they're doing. The proliferation of their missiles - they're essentially trying to "Lebanize" the Middle East. And they were able to really develop a forward-deployed missile base in Lebanon. And they certainly have the same aspirations in Iraq and Syria and Yemen, where they're using the Houthis as cutouts, proxies. Iran is very good in the gray zone and plausible deniability for these missile attacks. We don't make a distinction between the Iranian government and these Iranian Shia militias that are around the Middle East. And the president spoke on that very clearly recently after the attacks on our properties in Baghdad and Basra. With respect to our work with the ally - with our allies, I'm in regular touch not only with our European partners but met a couple of days ago with the Moroccan foreign minister, in regular conversations with countries around the world who are increasingly worried about the missile proliferation threat. I think nations are increasingly uncomfortable limiting the scope of the discussion on Iran to just the Iran nuclear deal. And it's very important that nations become more aware of the dangers that this kind of proliferation presents to their own people because Iran is not really constraining its missile development, its proliferation and its testing. And if we want to have a stable and prosperous Middle East, it starts with constraining Iran.

HEINRICHES: Then you mentioned, you know - we're again talking about that missile in particular that landed in Saudi. We've been collecting - we as a country been collecting some of the missile debris, missile parts and other weapons, illicit weapons, throughout the region and then to sort of showcase - to showcase some of our allies what we've been collecting. And I'm - I've seen that display. And one of the things I thought was remarkable was that they're not hiding the fact that these are of Iranian origin. What do you make of that? What is it - what do we think of it of the brazenness of what the Iranians are doing?

HOOK: There was a prohibition in the U.N. Security Council under Chapter Seven on Iran's ballistic missile program that was largely lifted under 22 - under the Security Council resolution that then memorialized the Iran nuclear deal. And I think Iran understands that they have a lot of running room as a consequence of that. And so you see it. I was at the - I was at Bolling yesterday. And we now actually have new exhibits. I'm sorry to say that we have new missiles and other weapons that have now been brought to the United States from the battlefield. And you can see the missiles - they're in Farsi - very clearly. One that was recovered in Yemen, you can see Shahid Bagheri Industries stamped on the missile parts. If you look at the missile that I was talking about that flew from Yemen into the Saudi airport - right by the airport there, it's stamped with Shahid Bagheri Industries. The logo is right there. It's impossible to miss. And so I think that they feel like they can do this with impunity. And that's something which the international community ignores at its peril. We've got to get after this problem.

HEINRICHES: Great. At this time, if you all have questions that you want to pass to the audience, we'll go ahead and collect those. And then just in a few minutes, I will - oh, look at that. You all are on top of things. Thank you so much. Great. Well, then, I just - another question on that. What do you see, then - one of the things that people who were in favor of the JCPOA - one of the things that they say whenever we bring up the missile problem is they say, you know, we were trying to singularly focus on the nuclear piece. And if we bring in other things, then the deal will sink. And so the Iranians - they didn't want - they refused to include missiles, and so that was something we just talked about. Which - to me, that was an indicator that if it's that important to the Iranians, and if missiles are the delivery systems for nuclear weapons, then that was a signal to us that they did not make a strategic decision to move away from their nuclear...

HOOK: Correct.

HEINRICHES: And to the extent that you can talk about that, and especially their space launch program - their space launch program can also be used - that technology - to their ICBM program. So do we have any - is the missile - is there a connection between - can we tell something about the nature of the regime, and the fact that they were unwilling to include especially ICBMs in that Iran deal, their intent on their nuclear program and the direction that they want to go?

HOOK: Yeah. It was a mistake not to include ICBMs in the Iran nuclear deal. And when I was engaged in negotiations with the E3 to try to address some of the deficiencies of the Iran deal, ICBMs was a core deficiency that we needed to get addressed. Nukes and ICBMs go hand in hand. They don't ever travel apart. And so it is insufficient to have an Iran - a deal with Iran on its nuclear program that doesn't include ICBMs. More than that, though, by not including ICBMs, it really gave Iran the kind of latitude that it desired to keep developing, testing and proliferating its missile program. But it didn't limit it to just missiles. When you look at it in terms of the terrorism that it supports, the cyberattacks that it engages in, the maritime aggression - Iran continues to threaten to close the Strait of Hormuz. So far from constraining Iran's regional activities, we have seen an acceleration of those activities under the life of the Iran nuclear deal. That is why our new strategy and Secretary Pompeo's 12 requirements are meant to address the totality of threats that Iran presents and the new deal that we hope to be able to sign with Iran. And it will not be a personal agreement between two governments like the last one. We seek a treaty, and that's very important. In terms of - you know, the Iran nuclear deal was an agreement made by Iran with the president at the time. It was not a treaty. They did not have the votes in the U.S. Senate, and so they found the votes in the U.N. Security Council, and that's insufficient in our system of government if you want to have something enduring and sustainable. And so that's why we have called for a treaty, which the Iran nuclear deal should've been a treaty. It's something which rises to - that element of nonproliferation was significant enough that it deserved, I think, consideration by the Senate. And so we're going to keep working with our allies. Secretary Pompeo talked about this in his May speech. We are expanding our diplomacy. Of course, we work very closely with the E3, with China, Russia. But we know that this threat is not limited to those countries that were members of the deal. It's much broader than that. Iran presents international threats to peace and security. And so an international problem requires an international solution. And so we continue to work with countries around the world.

HEINRICHES: Right. Well, there's - we've got a question teed up just to that end here. So if India and China, in particular, agree to help U.S. pressure - agree to help the United States pressure Iran on ballistic missiles, what about India and China's purchases of Iranian oil by India and China? And then you can even broaden that and - to talk about, in general, some of our allies and partners and their continued business with Iran that does continue to enable or prop up the regime. And what is the United States willing to do in order to get that to stop?

HOOK: We have said that our goal is to get imports of Iranian oil to zero. I think something like 80 percent of Iran's tax revenues are based on oil. And the regime's economy is deliberately opaque. It is designed to never know whether you're facilitating commerce or terrorism. And we are trying to get after the money. And we have seen well over a hundred major firms around the world announce their intention to leave the Iranian market, and that was before. We were already seeing a decline in foreign direct investment before the president decided to leave the deal. So we - our sanctions regime, whether that concerns oil or the energy, banking - the whole range of revenues that flow from the central bank of Iran and other banks - we are trying to get after that revenue to deny the regime the money it needs to fund its nuclear program, its missile program, its terrorism, its cyberattacks, its maritime aggression, its repression of its own citizens. That is the purpose of our sanctions regime. It is not to punish companies. It is designed to achieve national security objectives so that we can contribute to a more peaceful Middle East.

HEINRICHES: I think that's important, too, because, you know, I hear a lot of people say sanctions aren't working. Well, you have to understand the purpose of those sanctions. And sometimes they take a little bit of time.

HOOK: They do.

HEINRICHES: We're trying to get back to the international consensus, as you mentioned, pre-JCPOA, which was choking out the Iranian economy the best that we could in order to dry up those funds to use for their malign behavior.

HOOK: Yeah. We had started - I had worked at the U.S. Mission to the U.N. and was one of the negotiators of all of the Iran sanctions resolutions - 1696, 1737, 1747. Many of these resolutions were the sanctions architecture that were lifted under the Iran nuclear deal. It took many years for Iran to feel the effects of that pressure. But ultimately, they came to the negotiating table. Our strongest sanctions don't go into effect until early November. And we believe that Iran tends to come to the negotiating table once they feel the pressure. And in the absence of that pressure, they continue to behave like they always behave. And the sanctions relief that was given to Iran as part of the nuclear deal was squandered in their foreign adventurism. And so one of the questions that I ask is, why would Iran spend more money - why would Iran spend less money on terrorism if given more money to spend on terrorism? That's what this regime does. And so I think the Iran nuclear deal was premised in part under the flawed premise that this sort of relief would moderate the regime. And unfortunately, we've seen the opposite.

HEINRICHES: And I do think it's interesting. Even though it does take a little bit of time for sanctions to take effect, it has been rather remarkable, since the United States has been imposing these sanctions, the effect that it is having...

HOOK: It's having, yes.

HEINRICHES: ...On the Iran deal. And so it sort of refutes the argument that we can't ever get back to that - that it's lost, that that was the best deal we can achieve and there's no other opportunity. Clearly, that has not been the case, and that the United States is able, and because many of our allies would rather do business with the United States than with Iran, that those hard choices are being made, and we are making a lot of progress there.

HOOK: And if you look at the 12 requirements, some have said that these 12 requirements that the secretary has laid out are unrealistic. I don't know how it's more realistic to accept the status quo. And if you look at those 12 requirements, those were the global consensus prior to the JCPOA.

HEINRICHES: This one is pretty specific. Let's see if you can answer, and if you can't, that's OK. What is the extent of Iran's missile presence in Syria? So we know that the Iranian government has been pouring billions of dollars to prop up the Assad regime and to continue that civil war. Can you talk about what Iran's doing specifically in terms of providing missiles and weaponry to the Syrian government?

HOOK: Yes. We're seeing - one thing to bear in mind is that since 2012, Iran has provided \$16 billion to its partners in Syria, in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen. And they've extended - I think it's \$4.6 billion in lines of credit to Assad. And I don't know how this helps what's going on in Syria. So we are increasingly - we are very concerned. Secretary Pompeo has said that all forces under Iranian command need to get out of Syria. That is our requirement as part of the political track that we are pursuing with Staffan de Mistura, the U.N. special representative. And so we do have now this agreement in Idlib that gives us some space to try to make some progress along the political track. Our - I work very closely with Jim Jeffrey, the secretary - special representative for Syria engagement, with Joel Rayburn. Our Iran strategy - part of the 12 requirements include Syria. And then we also have Jim and Joel making the - Iran's - ending Iran's presence. This is, again, the - those units that are under Iranian control need to get out of Syria. This is a diplomatic priority for Jim's work. It's a priority for my work to impose sufficient pressure on Iran that the cost-benefit analysis changes for Iran in terms of its proliferation into Syria. And that also extends to Iraq. We are trying to change the cost-benefit analysis for Iran's malign behavior in Iraq and Syria.

HEINRICHES: Is there any - this individual wants to know, is there any scope for partnering with Iran, on a limited scope here, on the stabilization and reconstruction? I know this is kind of getting a little bit - but you just mentioned Iraq in particular. Is there any prospect, or any - have you seen - I'll put it this way. Have you seen that calculus begin to change, especially in Iraq? And is Iran moderating its behavior or showing that perhaps it isn't worth what it's doing to destabilize Iraq, and then it could be part of the solution and not part of the problem?

HOOK: I think after - you saw the press reports about Iran trading missiles into Iraq. You then had attacks on our embassy a couple of weeks ago on Thursday and Friday. Then you had the attacks on Saturday in Basra. You also had the missile launches from inside of Iran into Erbil. And so we have - the president has signaled to the Iranians that we are taking this - what seems to be some sort of escalatory behavior on the part of Iran - very seriously and that America will take swift and decisive action to protect our properties and our people in Iraq. So it's very important that the Iranians understand our resolve.

HEINRICHES: I like this question. This is - you do work very closely with our allies in trying to make some progress on this front. What about Congress? Do you - what's the extent that you have any interaction in persuading and talking to Congress? And do you see, especially in this highly polarized, politicized environment right now - during the JCPOA negotiations, you had senators - Democrat senators like Senator Schumer laid out - I thought Senator Schumer made the best case for not agreeing to the JCPOA. He wrote a press release and laid out all of these things, and missiles was one of his concerns. Do you see opportunities there for consensus in Congress to cooperate with them to actually help implement sanctions?

HOOK: That's a good question. I work very closely with Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee - with Chairman Royce, Chairman Corker, the ranking members, various members on the committee. I have made it a point during my time working on Iran to work very closely with both Houses of Congress. You had a lot of opposition to the Iran deal when it was being negotiated. That's why it didn't enjoy the support of the Congress. There was a period then when the president had said that he's willing to stay in the deal if we can address these three deficiencies. There was support, I think, in the Congress for doing that. We were not able to reach an agreement with the E3 to address - we got very close, but we were not able to end the sunset provisions. Iran has not earned the trust of the international community to have restrictions on its nuclear program lifted. And so for us, in addition to ICBM's, it was critical that we end the sunsets and that the one-year breakout standard exist in perpetuity. We were not able to do that. The president left the deal. What I'm - now that we're out, we're very much focused on achieving our objectives across the sort of the range of threats that Iran presents. And in my discussions with Congress, there was a great deal of support. This is not an issue with many factions. It's something which I think everybody recognizes the problem. And Congress has been a very good partner in this way.

HEINRICHES: That's great and encouraging. And I thought of something too as our little friend was talking here in the beginning. She was talking a lot about how this was going to hurt the Iranian people. But to the contrary, actually, part of the Trump administration's approach towards Iran, which I think has been remarkable and right on, which is to say, no, the Iranian government has been the number one threat to the Iranian people and peace in Iran.

HOOK: Yeah.

HEINRICHES: So can you talk a little bit about the separation between the regime and the Iranian people?

HOOK: A couple of things - in 2009, when we had the Green Revolution there, the prior administration failed to stand with the Iranian people. And we corrected that mistake. And so in December and January - from the president on down, across the executive branch - strong, clear, robust support for the Iranian people validating the demands that they are making on their government. And when you look at some of the demands that they're making, it's the same demands that we're making. And so the president will be giving his speech at the U.N. General Assembly next week. I'm sure Iran, assuming the last time he talked to the Iranian people - in those remarks, we're going to continue that. It's very important that the Iranian people know that we stand with them in terms of the demands they're making on the government. And then our sanctions regime has exemptions - very clear exemptions for providing humanitarian relief and medicine and food and other things. And so that's going to continue. And our sanctions are directed at the Iranian regime so that they change their behavior. It's as simple as that. We need the Iranian regime to change its behavior. We've been very clear about the areas where we need to see them change their behavior. If they're willing to do that, there's a very, very bright future in store. But we need to see that behavior change first.

HEINRICHES: And it is worth noting that, again, after the JCPOA was implemented, and there were sanctions relief, and Iranians received this revenue, that the Iranian government didn't spend it on their own economy and helping their own people and that terrorism continued, missile development continued. And Iranian people obviously saw that. They had some patience there in the beginning, and that quickly ran out. And so the kinds of protests we're seeing now on the streets are different than the Green Revolution in that you're seeing it across all demographics and all different socioeconomic status in Iran. So it really does seem different - that it really is against the regime itself, including the mullahs there. So it's a remarkable thing that's happening right now in Iran.

HOOK: It is. It is.

HEINRICHES: And then my last - I got to ask this question. It's the last question because it's been asked multiple times. So people want to know here, what is the possibility for some high-ranking meeting between the United States government and Iran? And what are the prospects there?

HOOK: Well, I've met - I met with the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on the margins of the joint commission meeting in Vienna a number of months ago, when we were still in the Iran deal. I presented him with the list of Americans who are being unjustly detained inside of Iran. I said these people have suffered long enough, and they need to be let go. So that was the nature of my conversation at the time. The president and the secretary have all made clear that we are ready to negotiate and to have those discussions. I think the ayatollah and the president, the foreign minister have all indicated that they're not interested in talking. That's their position. We respect that. That does not change our plans. We have a sanctions regime that is underway. The stronger measures are yet to come. And as I said, there hasn't been any aversion to meeting with the Iranians. I've done it. We also had a meeting - there was a joint commission ministerial during the last junction that Zarif attended and the United States attended. So we've made it very clear. We can't be more clear about the sort of things that we would like to see changed. And in return, these are the things that we're willing to offer. And that's where it is.

HEINRICHES: All right, I just want to say thank you so much for the work that you do on the behalf of the U.S. government. And thank you so much for your remarks here and the time that you spent with us. Please join me in thanking Brian.

(APPLAUSE)