



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

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*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.<sup>1</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 statutes 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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<sup>2</sup> "Rouhani: Mohuriyat-e 'Tawlid' Sha'ar-e Entehabatiem 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Fars News Agency (Tehran), “Ramezanzadeh: Siyasat-e Post Perdeh Dawlat-e Khatami Adameh-e Fa’liyatha-ye Hasteha-ye Bud,” June 14, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards Is Turning Theocracy into Military Dictatorship* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2013), pp. 165–203.

<sup>9</sup> 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-smear tail through it."<sup>10</sup>

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).<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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."<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> In an October 1, 1979 television address,

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

<sup>11</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>14</sup> Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), p. 239.

<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, some US officials dismissed reports of an anthrax outbreak in Sverdlovsk as food poisoning, even though the anthrax was airborne and infected hundreds.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup> 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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<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> Elisa D. Harris "Sverdlovsk and Yellow Rain: Two Cases of Soviet Noncompliance?" *International Security*, Spring 1987, pp. 53-55.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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."<sup>22</sup> Stephen Bosworth, the US ambassador to South Korea, also insisted that the Agreed Framework was on track.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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."<sup>26</sup> 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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<sup>20</sup> David E. Sanger "Seoul's Leader Says North Is Manipulating U.S. on Nuclear Issue," *New York Times*, July 2, 1993.

<sup>21</sup> Wit et al., *Going Critical*, pp. 314–315.

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Burns, State Department Daily Press Briefing, June 9, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> Yonhap News Agency (Seoul), "US Envoy Says Four-Way Preferable to Six-Way Talks on Korean Peace," October 20, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> US General Accounting Office, "Foreign Assistance: North Korea Restricts Food Aid Monitoring," GAO/NSIAD-00-35, October 1999.

<sup>25</sup> General Accounting Office, "Nuclear Nonproliferation: Status of Heavy Fuel Oil Delivered to North Korea Under the Agreed Framework," GAO/RCED-99-276, September 1999.

<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup> 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?"<sup>29</sup> 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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<sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Baker "Despite Arrests, Working to Rebuild Russia Ties," *New York Times*, July 1, 2010, p. A3.

<sup>29</sup> 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.

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Name: MICHAEL RUBIN

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2012. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

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2. Please list any entity you are testifying on behalf of and briefly describe your relationship with these entities.

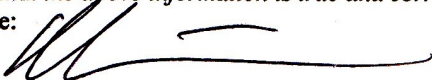
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Michael Rubin is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, senior lecturer at the Naval Postgraduate School, and senior editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*. Between 2002 and 2004, Rubin worked as a staff advisor for Iran and Iraq in the Office of the Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon, in which capacity he was seconded to Iraq. Between 2004 and 2009, he was chief editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*.

A native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Rubin received a B.S. degree in biology from Yale University in 1994, and a Ph.D. in history from the same institution in 1999. He has previously worked as a lecturer in Iranian history at Yale University; Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC; and at three different universities in northern Iraq. Rubin currently teaches seminars about Iran, terrorism, and the Middle East to the FBI, and to deploying U.S. Carrier Strike Groups and Marine Expeditionary Units. He has lived and conducted research in Yemen, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and with the Taliban in Afghanistan pre-9/11.

Rubin is author most recently of *Dancing with the Devil: The Perils of Engagement* (Encounter, 2015), a history of a half-century of American diplomacy with rogue regimes and terrorist groups, *The Shi'ites of the Middle East* (AEI, 2014) and two earlier books examining Iranian history. He will publish *Kurdistan Rising* (AEI, 2016) in June 2016.

Rubin currently lives in Bethesda, Maryland, with his wife and two children.

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