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Remarks by Tim Morrison, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Weapons of Mass Destruction and Biodefense, National Security Council

Speakers:

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(APPLAUSE)

DUBOWITZ: So, as I mentioned earlier, today marks the one-year anniversary of the U.S. decision to withdraw from the JCPOA, the Iran deal. And while that decision has certainly changed the diplomatic landscape between the United States, Iran and the P5+1, it certainly hasn't lessened the proliferation threat and other threats posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear program and its -- and its malign activities.

So I'm pleased to introduce somebody who's at the -- the tip of the spear in countering those threats, somebody who is here to address how the administration views policy towards combating nuclear proliferation. I'm very pleased to introduce our next speaker, Tim Morrison.

Tim joined the National Security Council nearly a year ago, and he serves as the special assistant to the President and the Senior Director for Weapons of Mass Destruction and Biodefense.

He oversees and coordinates the development of national policies and programs to reduce global threats from nuclear, biological and chemical weapons to prevent proliferation, to manage arms control and block the use of emerging technology for the development of WMD.

Tim has served our nation for many years. He served as the policy director on the House Armed Services Committee, where he coordinated the committee's activities regarding the National Defense Policy of 2018. And he also served as Senator Jon Kyl's longstanding national security advisor.

I've had really great pleasure working with Tim for all these years. And now working with Tim and his colleagues at the NSC as they develop and implement policies relating to the Islamic Republic of Iran and -- and other problem sets. So I very much look forward to hearing from Tim today. And please join me in welcoming, Tim Morrison.

(APPLAUSE)

MORRISON: So thank you all. I have really the worst job in Washington today. I have to follow General H.R. McMaster and I have to precede Chairman Mac Thornberry. There are not two more patriotic and erudite national security thinkers around than General McMaster and Chairman Thornberry, and I'm -- I'm privileged to be here.

I was thinking, in General McMaster's introduction, I'm also often known by one name but it's -- it's not fit for polite company.

(LAUGHTER)

So I want to thank you, to FDD, to Mark Dubowitz, Cliff May, General McMaster, Brad Bowman, a longtime colleague on the Hill.

I was thinking about how long I've know Mark Dubowitz and I -- we've been doing Iran policy together for quite some time. And it was either working on Iran so long or I used to get advice from Mark on where I'd get a finely tailored French suit.

But there's -- there's not that many people who can generate so much personal ad hominem ire in the echo chamber. And I think it really just speaks to Mark's effectiveness and FDD's effectiveness. So I'm -- I'm privileged to be here today.

As was observed, today is the one-year anniversary of the president's decision to cease participation in Iran nuclear deal. Never before had so much been paid to a terrorist regime for so little in the sake of nonproliferation.

The deal provided Iran, what we call, patient pathways to nuclear weapons. No permanent dismantlement of nuclear infrastructure, illicit facilities like Fordow remained open. Some centrifuge equipment was put into storage, while R&D on advanced centrifuges was allowed to continue. The deal sunset in the out years and let Iran keep its program largely intact to continue both enrichment and reprocessing activities under the cover of international legitimacy.

The deal provided legitimacy with respect to the enrichment of uranium on Iranian soil, something Iran has no right to do under the nonproliferation treaty. The deal not only failed to halt Iran's development of advanced ballistic missiles that could carry nuclear warheads, it weakened the international consensus against such activity established by prior U.N. Security Council resolutions.

As if this wasn't enough, America unilaterally disarmed itself of every significant tool of economic pressure by granting billions of dollars in sanctions relief that Iran, in turn, used to fuel its sponsorship of terrorism, to fight a war to save Assad in Syria, to foment violence in Yemen and to expand its missile arsenal.

However, thanks to the president's decision to end the JCPOA, we have ended the myth that Iran's nuclear program is somehow peaceful, that Iran has no long-term ambitions to develop

nuclear weapons, that Iran came clean to international inspectors about its past activities in 2015 under the JCPOA.

Now, we can have a clear-eyed dialogue about what Iran's nuclear program looks like today, what we know and what we still don't know, and how Iran's secret nuclear archive may be our guide to the future.

Let's be clear, Iran lied to the world in 2015. We know that it hid its nuclear archive from the world, maintained the know-how and workforce to one day resume its work on nuclear weapons when Iran's supreme leader chose. It is no coincidence that the founder of Iran's former nuclear weapons program now heads an organization, the SPND, that employs scientists who worked on that program.

As the discovery of Iran's secret nuclear archive demonstrated to the world, Iran cannot be trusted with nuclear capability. Iran refuses to address critical questions related to the archive.

Furthermore, the United States maintains serious questions with respect to Iran's compliance with its nuclear nonproliferation treaty obligations and its comprehensive safeguard agreement. Iran's nuclear program should not receive international legitimacy until all questions are resolved.

In November 2018, the United States re-imposed all pre-JCPOA sanctions on nuclear cooperation with Iran, including by re-designating 23 Atomic Energy Organization of Iran entities and individuals, and by placing new limits of foreign assistance that could expand Iran's nuclear program beyond the current restrictions.

In March of 2019, the United States designated an additional 31 Iranian individuals and entities linked to Iran's nuclear proliferation-sensitive activities, including scientists who had worked on Iran's former nuclear weapons program and who remain employed by Iran on potentially -- potentially sensitive dual-use technologies under the leadership of the former head of that nuclear weapons program.

Last week, the administration took another step, ending sanctions waivers that enable Iran to enrich uranium. The United States has been clear that Iran must stop all proliferation-sensitive activities, including uranium enrichment, and we will not accept mechanisms that condone the continuation of such enrichment. Iran has no right to enrich under the NPT, and we will not accept any Iranian enrichment in a future agreement.

Secretary Pompeo has been clear about this since his 12 pillar speech in May of 2018. Any involvement in transferring enriched uranium out of Iran in exchange for natural uranium is now subject to U.S. secondary sanctions. In light of unanswered questions arising from Iran's secret nuclear archive and the historically illicit nature of the Fordow nuclear facility, the United States is putting any further sanctions waiver for the nuclear cooperation projects that legitimize Fordow under short-term review.

A similar review is taking place for projects at the Arak reactor. There cannot be business as usual with Iran, in particular with its nuclear program, and we will not countenance any expansion of Iran's nuclear materials or technology.

While Iran's nuclear ambitions remain an ongoing threat, Iran's accelerating development of ballistic and cruise missiles pose as a growing danger to the Middle East, Europe, and potentially the U.S. homeland. Iran has the largest ballistic missile force in the region, with more than 10 ballistic missile systems either in its inventory or under development. I wish we had that many.

Iran is a serial missile proliferator, providing ballistic missiles to its proxies and building missile production facilities outside of its borders. Iran's missile proliferation poses one of the greatest threats to regional security and stability.

Iran continues to develop longer and longer range, nuclear-capable ballistic missiles in defiance of long-standing international demands that Iran halt such -- such activities. And Iran continues to test a number of space-launch vehicles, which provide Iran a technological path towards the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Let's be clear, this is not about Iranian DirecTV. Iran is not planning a Farsi GPS. This is a ballistic missile program.

As the 2019 Missile Defense Review made clear, Iran is an emerging missile threat to the American homeland, and the administration is investing significantly in our ballistic missile defense architecture to defend the American people against this threat. We are also committed to missile defense cooperation throughout the Middle East, with key allies who live under constant missile threat from Iran and its proxies.

Now, as I said, one year ago today, President Trump rejected the failed path of the JCPOA, a path that made Iran stronger and America and her allies more vulnerable and adopted a better path: maximum pressure to force Iran to behave like a normal nation.

Secretary Pompeo has issued 12 demands on behalf of the United States. These demands are -- or include: Iran must declare to the IAEA a full account of its prior military dimensions of its nuclear program and permanently and verifiably abandon such work in perpetuity. Iran must stop enrichment and never pursue plutonium reprocessing; this includes -- includes closing its heavy water reactor.

Iran must also provide the IAEA with unqualified access to all sites throughout the country. And Iran must end its proliferation of ballistic missiles and halt further launching or development of nuclear-capable missile systems.

Now to make Tehran's choice as clear as possible, the president has re-imposed sanctions on Iran's energy, shipping, and financial sectors, even convincing the SWIFT financial messaging service to disconnect all designated Iranian banks. Last week the president ended all

exceptions to our oil sanctions on Iran, targeting Iran's number one source of revenue. And we are not done. Expect more sanctions soon. Very soon.

Under the JCPOA, Iran's economy was expanding. Trade and investment was growing, and the currency was stable. Because of the president's policies, Iran's economy is in the midst of its worst recession. International trade investment is disappearing, and the rial continues to plummet. Inflation is out of control, and there are even reports of money drying up among Iran's terrorist proxies.

Tehran has a choice. At some point, even the mullahs will get it. This is a time for countries who claim an interest in a stable Mideast to put action behind their words.

For example, even under the harshest sanctions, Iran finds illicit ways to import the goods it needs to develop missiles and proliferate them. And too often, countries turn a blind eye to these activities. Perhaps the best example here is the case of Li Fangwei, otherwise known as Karl Lee. Lee is a key broker for Iran's ballistic missile program and provides significant assistance in support of Iran's ongoing efforts to develop more sophisticated missiles.

The equipment and components that Lee has provided to Iran have contributed to Iran's continued development of more advanced missiles with improved accuracy, range and lethality.

Iran now fields an array of short and medium-range ballistic missiles systems capable of threatening deployed U.S. forces, allies and partners, and Lee remains a fugitive from justice. The U.S. government is offering a \$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest.

Yet despite a warrant out for his arrest, more than a decade of imposing sanctions on Lee under U.S. law, and multiple media stories documenting his support to Iran, the Chinese government to-date has failed to take effective action to end his proliferation activity and bring him to justice.

Does China's government truly lack the means to deal with such criminal conduct in its own country? Does anyone in this room believe that?

We call on all governments that maintain ties with Beijing to make this a priority. For U.S. allies, especially those in the Gulf that face the threat of Iranian missiles every day, this should be a priority in their relations with China.

Iran's choice is simple: behave like a normal nation and enjoy full diplomatic and economic relations with the West, or behave like a rogue nation and suffer economic collapse.

We know which path the Iranian people would choose, if they had a choice, and maybe they should have a choice, like in any normal nation. Iran should not test America's resolve. The president, Ambassador Bolton and Secretary Pompeo have all put Iran on notice that the United States will not allow Iran to threaten U.S. interests.

As Ambassador Bolton said this week, the United States is not seeking war with the Iranian regime, but we are fully prepared to respond to any attack whether by proxy, the IRGC or regular Iranian forces.

Furthermore, the president -- President Trump has been absolutely clear he will never allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons. As Iran announces this morning it will resume some nuclear activities restricted by the JCPOA, now is the time for the community of nations to strongly condemn Iran's nuclear misconduct and increase pressure on the regime to comply with U.S. demands.

Let us be clear, this is nothing less than the nuclear blackmail of Europe.

To those who might seek to undermine America's maximum pressure campaign by violating U.S. sanctions, you will be found and held accountable. The United States will fully enforce its Iranian sanctions.

If you're a bank, an investor, an insurer, or other business in Europe, you should know that getting involved in the INSTEX special purpose vehicle is a very poor business decision. The U.S. will move swiftly against any attempt to undermine our sanctions pressure. Frankly, we think it is ludicrous for any country to search for ways to fund a regime that finances terrorism on its own soil.

I wanted to -- thank you to FDD for hosting this event and I want to congratulate you on the launch of your new center, General. We've come a long way in one year with a lot more work to do.

The Iran deal is fatally flawed, broken beyond repair. But America's 12 conditions offer the basis for a comprehensive agreement that can strengthen U.S. national security while giving the Iranian people the future they deserve.

The pressure will only get stronger until these conditions are met. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

QUESTION: Riechmann with Associated Press. What do you think the chances are for, like, small skirmishes between, you know, U.S. forces or Iranian boats and stuff on seas, or -- or maybe just sort of small, little confrontations, not big ones right now.

And also, what do you want the Europeans to do at this point?

MORRISON: So on the first question...

QUESTION: What are you asking them to do?

MORRISON: On the first question, I'll -- I'll defer to the Department of Defense. I know you have General McKenzie from CENTCOM this afternoon. That's a better question for -- for -  
- for him.

On the question for what to do -- what the Europeans should do, again I think from our perspective, it's pretty clear what the Iranians are doing. This is a fairly naked attempt at -- at -- at blackmail to try to induce -- and they were very clear in their messaging even this morning, they want to see progress made on the special purpose vehicle, they want to see a resumption of -  
- of oil or they will walk away from the obligation that they took on.

That -- that's fairly clear, and I think Iran should resist it and they should join us in driving Iran to the table -- excuse me, Europe should resist it and drive Iran to the table to come to a deal along the lines of what Secretary Pompeo outlined last night.

QUESTION: Thank you. Hi Dan Raviv of i24 News. Thanks very much for exposing yourself to some questions as well. What frankly is your prediction? I mean, I think we've heard from the president that he thinks Iran will want to enter negotiations with the U.S.

Do you -- do you pick up any sign of that?

MORRISON: So I think the president is doing everything possible to make very clear to the mullahs what their choice is. They -- we -- we have additional pressure tools that we will bring to bear, or we have a path where they can have that normal relationship with the West along the lines of what we outlined.

The -- the president has -- has now had two summits with the North Koreans to -- to show them that there is a better way forward. It's just a question of whether or not the mullahs can countenance what's best for the Iranian people.

QUESTION: Do you see any -- Julian Barnes, New York Times -- do you see any areas of agreement between the administration and Europe in regards to what to ask Iran for? For example, do you think you can come to agreement within IAEA context on some more aggressive inspections and have a united front on that?

Is there any place for some agreement in -- in -- in a pressure campaign?

MORRISON: I -- I mean I think, from our perspectives, the -- it's -- it's the -- the idea of a -- of a family disagreement here is maybe overhyped.

I understand the need to sell newspapers, but we agree with Europe on far more than we disagree. Our -- our alliance with NATO, for example, has never been stronger. We welcome the decision to -- to take punitive measures against Mahan Air.

There are areas of disagreement about how to get Iran to the table. But I would just look to the tremendous areas of overlap and agreement, and -- and maybe spend a little less time focusing on the minor areas where we disagree.

But I'm being told my time's up, so saved by the bell.

(LAUGHTER)

(APPLAUSE)

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