Royce-Engel Letter Calling for Greater Consultation on Iran Sanctions Relief

Dear Mr. President:

Iran's nuclear program poses a grave threat to the national security of the United States and our allies. As the July 20th deadline for a "comprehensive solution" to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon approaches, we urge greater consultation with Congress on a potential sanctions relief package that may be part of a final agreement.

Our two branches of government have long been partners in working to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. However, as these hugely consequential national security decisions are made, greater cooperation between Congress and the Executive Branch is essential, given that any permanent sanctions relief demands congressional approval.

When asked if your Administration would come to Congress to secure legislative relief of sanctions in a final agreement with Iran, in a recent Congressional hearing, Secretary of State John Kerry responded: "(w)ell, of course. We would be obligated to under the law." He added that "what we do will have to pass muster with Congress." We strongly agree with the Secretary's assessment, and believe the final agreement must verifiably ensure that Iran is denied an undetectable nuclear weapons breakout capability.

Your Administration has committed to comprehensively lifting "nuclear-related" sanctions as part of a final P5+1 agreement with Tehran. Yet the concept of an exclusively defined "nuclear-related" sanction on Iran does not exist in U.S. law. Almost all sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program are also related to Tehran's advancing ballistic missile program, intensifying support for international terrorism, and other unconventional weapons programs. Similarly, many of these sanctions are aimed at preventing Iranian banks involved in proliferation, terrorism, money laundering and other activities from utilizing the U.S. and global financial systems to advance these destructive policies.

Iran's permanent and verifiable termination of all of these activities - not just some - is a prerequisite for permanently lifting most congressionally-mandated sanctions. This often unnoted reality necessitates extensive engagement with Congress before offers of relief are made to Iran, and requires Congressional action if sanctions are to be permanently lifted. With the July 20 negotiating deadline on the near horizon, we hope that your Administration will now engage in substantive consultations with Congress on the scope of acceptable sanctions relief.

It would be wise for Congress and the Executive Branch to work closely together to end the threat that Iran's efforts to acquire a nuclear weapons capability pose to U.S. national security. We look forward to working constructively with your Administration on a solution to the Iranian nuclear threat. Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Edward Royce (R-CA) Eliot Engel (D-NY)