



Congress Keeps Pressure on Iran

The Iranian government continues to press ahead with its plans to inject dangerous nuclear weapons into one of the world's most unstable regions. In response, members of the House of Representatives and the Senate are attempting to use their legislative authority in order to increase the pressure on the regime in Tehran.

In addition to supporting major Iran sanctions legislation, such as the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act (IRPSA) and the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act (ISEA), lawmakers are proceeding with a number of important initiatives.

One such initiative is the Reduce Iranian Cyber-Suppression Act. Senators Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC) have introduced this bill which would prohibit the U.S. government from doing business with firms that export sensitive communication technology to Iran. This legislation is largely a response to the Iranian regime's use of such technology to monitor Iranian citizens and suppress domestic dissent in the aftermath of the Iranian presidential election.

Another piece of legislation, which was introduced by Representatives Brad Sherman (D-FL) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), is the Enable Divestment from Sudan and Iran Act of 2009. This bill seeks to make it easier for individuals to divest from Iran or Sudan by allowing them to defer payment of capital gains taxes after selling securities issued by companies invested in Iran or Sudan. Instead, individuals would be able to purchase similar securities issued by companies not investing in the two nations.

Lawmakers are supplementing the legislation with aggressive campaigns to make business ties to Iran more transparent. One example of such efforts has been instigated by Representatives Sherman and Dan Burton (R-IN), who are unhappy with Royal Dutch Shell's investments in the Iranian energy sector.

During a meeting of Shell's shareholders, company executives refused to answer questions about Shell's business in Iran – information the members of Congress believe the company is required to disclose to its investors. In response to Shell's lack of transparency, Burton and Sherman have written a letter to Shell, warning the company of potential sanctions if it continues to operate in Iran. The two lawmakers also advised Shell that they are urging the SEC to open an investigation against the company for failing to disclose the information to its investors.

Another campaign, led by Representative Mark Kirk (R-IL), would require the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to ensure that all companies publicly traded in the United States disclose their business ties to state sponsors of terrorism. In addition, Senators Chris Dodd (D-CT) and David Vitter (R-LA) have each sent letters to the SEC calling for greater disclosures of investments in Iran and Sudan.

Members of Congress are justifiably concerned about Iran's uranium enrichment, and are working to peaceably convince the Islamic Republic to abandon its nuclear program. While IRPSA and ISEA have the most potential to alter Iran's policy, members of Congress are being vigilant and using numerous approaches to keep the pressure on the leadership in Tehran.