

H CON RES 362- A PRELUDE TO WAR?

* **The action demanded by this resolution would be construed as an act of war.** This bill asks the president to impose a land, sea, and air interdiction of all people and goods moving into and out of Iran. By whatever name it is called, unless authorized by the UN, this action would be widely construed as a blockade and an act of war by Iran and most of the international community. This legislation will likely be perceived as a response to a May 2008 meeting in Jerusalem between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and key members of Congress, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and lead sponsor of the bill Rep. Gary Ackerman (NY). *Ha'aretz* reported that the prime minister suggested at the meeting that the US impose a naval blockade of Iran and a travel ban of Iranian officials (though Pelosi's office subsequently denied that the suggestion was made).

* **This action is far more hostile than US or UN sanctions.** Never before has the US or UN imposed "stringent inspection requirements" on Iranian trade. Clause 3 of this bill "demands that the President initiate an international effort" by "prohibiting the export to Iran of all refined petroleum products; *imposing stringent inspection requirements on all persons, vehicles, ships, planes, trains, and cargo entering or departing Iran*".

* **There is no way to effectively implement such a stringent inspection regime without the use of force.** Since Iranian ships, trains, and aircraft will not voluntarily comply with "stringent inspection requirements," effectively implementing the resolution would require the use of force. Supporters of the bill point to its language that "nothing in this resolution shall be construed as an authorization of the use of force against Iran." The resolution does not authorize the use of force but it demands that the president lead an effort that would require force. Sponsors say the methods contemplated to enforce the inspection regime is limited to enforcement of export controls by states within their own borders, but this is completely at odds with the language of the resolution, which speaks of inspection of all persons and goods going to or coming from Iran.

* **The potential for another January 2008 speedboat incident would greatly increase.** Vice Admiral Kevin Cosgriff said of the incident that "the four Iranian Revolutionary Guard commanders came within 10 seconds of being dead." Demanding the US and a coalition of the willing control the flow of Iranian trade would only increase the chances of Iranian provocation in the Persian Gulf spiraling into an open shooting war with Iran.

* **The last shred of US-Iran diplomacy would be taken off the table.** Clause 3 also demands that the president initiate an international effort "prohibiting the international movement of all Iranian officials not involved in negotiating the suspension of Iran's nuclear program." The administration has signaled it is prepared to resume talks with Iran as recently as June 10th, when Ambassador Satterfield said at a news briefing of US-Iranian negotiations over Iraq that "this channel is one we have not closed and will not close". This resolution is an endorsement of obstructing our own and every other country's diplomatic relations with Iran unless Iran suspends its enrichment of uranium.



*** Even the threat of blocking all Iranian trade would cause oil prices to soar.** The largest one-day surge in oil prices in history was influenced by an Israeli cabinet minister's threats of attacking Iran. A study from the Energy Information Agency examining the effects of such an inspection regime on the Iranians and world oil markets is forthcoming. This legislation does not offer any information as to what the effect of a "stringent inspection regime" on Iranian trade would be on the American and global economy.

*** This resolution, intended to prevent Iran from seeking a nuclear weapon, would only be counterproductive and strengthen the resolve of Iranian hardliners.** Zbigniew Brzezinski and William Odom warned that "current US policy toward the regime in Tehran will certainly result in an Iran with nuclear weapons". Such a hostile action taken by Congress could jeopardize the ongoing P5 plus 1 negotiations over Iran's nuclear program.

*** This resolution ignores the recommendations from the NIE.** Congress needs to affirm the recommendation from December 2007 National Intelligence Estimate that the US should use "some combination of threats of intensified international scrutiny and pressures, along with opportunities for Iran to achieve its security, prestige, and goals for regional influence in other ways". This resolution rules out offering any such incentives for Iran and instead would only escalate tensions in the US-Iran relationship.

*** Direct diplomacy with Iran is absolutely essential for counter-proliferation efforts.** If Congress is serious about confronting the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program, it should join with former secretaries of state Albright, Baker, Christopher, Kissinger, and Powell in calling for the U.S. to talk to Iran. The US Navy's Commander in the Persian Gulf Vice Admiral Cosgriff warned that war with Iran would be "disastrous" and recommended that "the preferred path by far is the diplomatic path".

Former director of the IAEA Hans Blix, one of the world's foremost experts on diplomatic initiatives to halt nuclear proliferation, recommends direct negotiations with Iran without preconditions. On June 12th he criticized the US approach to Iran, warning that "The military threat may well be counterproductive," and that such threats are "more likely to strengthen the ranks in Iran."

This resolution would signal to Iran and the international community that Congress doesn't only affirm the administration's threats against Iran, but that Congress is urging the administration to go beyond threats and sanctions by obstructing the travel of all Iranians, the flow of all Iranian trade, and even ongoing diplomatic efforts between Iran and the international community.

Congress must vote against a land, air, and sea interdiction of Iranian trade and travel, and join five former secretaries of state in affirming the diplomatic option.

