

WebMemo



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Time for the Senate to Act on Iran Sanctions

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On September 28, the House of Representatives passed the Iran Freedom Support Act (H.R. 6198), which seeks to hold Iran accountable for its threatening behavior and to support a transition to democracy in Iran. This bipartisan bill would extend the Administration's authority to impose sanctions on Iran and is an important contribution to U.S. policy towards Iran, especially as the U.S. pushes for sanctions at the U.N. Security Council. Now the Senate must act to prevent the expiration of sanctions authority, which would send a dangerous signal of weakness to Iran at a time when it continues to thumb its nose at the U.N. Security Council in the confrontation over its nuclear program.

The Iran Freedom Support Act (IFSA) is sponsored by Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), the Chairman of the House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, and co-sponsored by Representative Henry Hyde (R-IL), the Chairman of the Committee; Representative Tom Lantos (D-CA), the ranking minority Member of the Committee; and Representative Gary Ackerman (D-NY) the ranking minority Member of the Subcommittee. IFSA renews and strengthens the sanctions authority authorized by the 1996 Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which expires today. IFSA extends ILSA sanctions authority regarding Iran until December 31, 2011, but excuses Libya, which is now cooperating with the United States to eliminate its weapons of mass destruction, from sanctions related to foreign investment in its oil industry.

IFSA also imposes mandatory sanctions against entities that provide goods or services that contribute to Iran's ability to acquire nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. It codifies existing economic sanctions against Iran and requires the President to notify Congress 15 days before terminating any of those sanctions. Additionally, it approves financial and political assistance for foreign and domestic organizations and individuals seeking to promote democratic reforms in Iran.

The Senate Should Not Allow Sanctions Authority to Expire

On September 28, Senators Rick Santorum (R-PA), Bill Frist (R-TN), John Cornyn (R-TX), and Bill Nelson (D-FL) introduced the Senate version (S. 3971) of the bill.

If the Senate does not act, the ILSA sanctions authority will expire. A failure to extend the sanctions authority will signal an American loss of will at a critical time when Iran continues to defy the U.N. Security Council's August 31 deadline for halting its uranium enrichment activities. Such a failure would severely undermine the Bush Administration's efforts to gain support for sanctions on

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Iran at the U.N. Security Council. Indeed, other nations, many of which have considerable trade with Iran, would be less likely to vote for U.N. sanctions if the U.S. Congress did not consider Iran's nuclear program enough of a threat to act to prevent the expiration of sanctions authority.

This scenario would undercut U.S. diplomatic efforts to pressure Iran to comply with its International Atomic Energy Agency safeguard commitments and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The European Union has continually emphasized the economic carrots available to Iran in the nuclear negotiations, but it has failed to grasp that,

for Iran, a nuclear weapon would be the biggest carrot of all. IFSA would strengthen multilateral diplomacy regarding Iran's nuclear program because it would raise the potential diplomatic and economic costs of Iran's continued defiance. As Representative Ros-Lehtinen put it, "Enough with the carrots. It's time for the stick."

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