

Stormy US Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on Iran Nuclear Pact.



JCS Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey testifying with Secretaries, Kerry, Lew, Carter, Moniz

US Senate Armed Services Committee, July 29, 2015

Source: Chip Somodevilla/Getty)

The Administration rolled out its "A Team" of witnesses at the US Senate Armed Services Committee hearings on July 29th, chaired by Chairman Arizona Republican Senator John McCain. The Hearing addressed national security issues arising from the Iran nuclear pact scheduled by a Congressional vote on or before September 17th under the term of the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act. Yesterday's hearing was the last in a series of House and Senate sessions prior to the summer recess adjournment starting Thursday, July 31st. Congress reconvenes following the Labor Day holiday giving less than 10 days for additional hearings before the vote to either accept or reject the Iran nuclear pact. Public opinion poll taken during the current series of Congressional shows a majority of Americans tilting towards asking Congress to reject the pact. The issue is how many of the undecided 13 Democratic Senators and over 30 Democratic Representatives will decide if a negative vote will be veto proof, given a threat by President Obama. The panel of witnesses included, Secretary of State John Kerry, Energy Secretary Earnest Moniz, Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and outgoing Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Martin

Dempsey. While questions naturally arose about the credibility of maintaining a military option, there was a tough grilling of Secretary Kerry and Secretary Moniz by Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton on the secret side deals between the UN nuclear watchdog agency, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Islamic Republic of Iran over prior military developments.

DefenseNews [reported](#) the comments of Secretary Carter and Gen. Dempsey on military capabilities:

“It’s important that we have an agreement and it be verifiable, and that we keep doing what we need to do: Defend our friends and allies, remain strong in the Gulf – frequent navigation, ballistic missile defense, all the things that we’re doing, and the agreement doesn’t limit us in any way,” Carter said.

Indeed, “military options remain,” Dempsey said, though a negotiated settlement provides a more “durable” solution, as well as time to work with local partner nations to address Iran’s activities. Dempsey said there are a series of initiatives with Israel and the Gulf Cooperation Council to that effect.

Exercising airstrikes to take out Iran’s nuclear capability would disrupt its program by several years, Dempsey said. However analysis suggests it would also provoke Iran to “counter our presence in the region at every opportunity and use these other malign activities they have.”

That led to exchanges with Senators Roger Wicker (R-MS) and Joni Ernst (R-NE). Ernst like Senate panel colleague Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AK) is a former combat veteran who served in Iraq:

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., characterized Dempsey’s brief opening statement, as a “tepid endorsement” of the accord and “damning disagreement with faint praise,” which

Dempsey disputed, saying he agreed with the deal.

His statement was neither “tepid nor enthusiastic, but pragmatic,” Dempsey said. His input in the deal was sought “episodically,” his final recommendation given weeks before negotiations concluded. At least in part, his recommendation was to keep pressure on Iran relative to ballistic missiles and arms trafficking for as long as possible.

Challenged by Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, over the president’s assertion that the US faces a choice between an Iran deal or a resolution by force – which Ernst characterized as “war” – Dempsey said he had not said anything to that effect to the president.

“We have a range of options, and I hope to present them,” Dempsey said. “As long as we agree, military strikes on a sovereign nation are an act of war, but there are things between here and there.”