

Congressman Rothman Asks Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain

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Washington, DC -- Congressman Steve Rothman (NJ-9), a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittees on State and Foreign Operations; and Defense, questioned Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at a hearing of the House Appropriations State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee on March 10, 2011. The Congressman's questions centered on America's strategy regarding concerns about Iranian influence in the Kingdom of Bahrain, Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability, and the progress in Iraq.

The exchange between Congressman Rothman and Secretary Clinton:

Congressman Rothman:

Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Secretary, I could spend the entire five minutes or more just extolling your extraordinary work as Secretary of State. You bring an incredible energy, intelligence, command of the issues, and - if I may say so - your credibility as Hillary Rodham and as Hillary Rodham Clinton, both. And the United States is much more secure and better off because of your service. God bless you and godspeed in your work.

I want to thank you for your leadership and the United States' veto at the Security Council on that one-sided, ridiculous resolution that was attempting to force an agreement on the two-state solution that Israel so desperately wants - that the Palestinians are resisting - by utilizing the UN just to criticize Israel, completely one-sided, typically one-sided, prejudicial action and I am so grateful for your leadership. I hope this now closes the book on the Palestinians - or anyone else - who would try to use the

UN as a substitute for direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. The Israelis desperately want a two-state solution, have put everything on the table and I regret that the Palestinians have not come to the table, I know you do too.

I also want to thank you for your remarks at the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, where you very candidly and forcefully questioned why there's a separate account - a standing committee to criticize the State of Israel. With all of the slaughter and genocide and human trafficking, and all of the other horrific things going on in the world, they have a standing committee to criticize the Jewish State of Israel. And I want to thank you for your very candid and forceful remarks.

Iran. Iran to me still remains the number one threat to the United States' national security. Iran has a great interest in the instability in North Africa, but in particular in the Gulf, and throughout the Middle East. Bahrain is the gateway, perhaps, to Saudi Arabia. It is a banking center, our fifth fleet is there, and a lot of people are worried that Iran is trying to use its influence to destabilize Bahrain and to take practical control of Bahrain and then move on to Saudi Arabia. Do you share those concerns? Do you see any Iranian involvement in the protests and demonstrations and uprising in Bahrain? And how can we continue to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons and destabilizing the region for its own hegemonic interests?

Secretary
Clinton:

Thank you, Congressman. And I appreciate your raising the continuing threat we see from Iran. While we are focused on the developments in North Africa and the Middle East, we have to continue to keep focused on Iran. And we certainly are. What we see happening right now - and I can only give you that snapshot, because our assessment now is that the internal discord in Bahrain is a domestic phenomenon that comes from the demands by the 70 percent Shia population for greater political rights, greater economic opportunities, and it requires a domestic solution. So what we've been doing is working with Bahrainis to work with themselves to try to come up with a way forward. Now, there is no doubt, as we have publicly and privately expressed, all people, according to our values, have a universal right to express themselves, to associate...assemble freely. And so, we have urged the government of Bahrain to respect those rights. At the same time, we have also credited what the government is trying to do through a national dialogue to come up with some agreed-upon reforms that would be implemented. You know, Bahrain is a friend, they are an ally, we deeply value their long-time association with us. King Hamad has announced that Crown Prince Salman is to lead this national dialogue, and we are encouraged by some of the steps we have seen recently, that this can result in a genuine dialogue.

Rothman:

Madam Secretary, are we keeping an eye on Iran and their attempts to gain influence in that region?

Clinton:

Yes. Now, so far, we don't see it evidencing itself,

but we keep a close look on it because we think Iran would try to influence anybody anywhere, against their own governments and against us. So, that's a very big part of what we're doing. And the sooner that the people themselves in Bahrain can move towards this national dialogue, the less concern we'll have about Iran.

Rothman:

Thank you, Madam Secretary. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

[...]

Rothman:

Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just want to make a comment about Iraq, which I think you have addressed in your remarks, but I want - it's very important. We have spent and will spend literally - ... thousands of American lives there, tens of thousands wounded of our brave young men and women. We have spent - and will spend - trillions of dollars on that war. Heretofore and in the future for health care for those who came home and other support. It would be a disaster if we did not do the follow-up after our troops were gone, such that Iraq became an unfriendly nation or God forbid became a satellite - like Lebanon - of Iran. And Iran, of course - as you well know, Madam Secretary - is interested in just that. And has invested in Iraqi elections and all kinds of other aspects of the Iraqi economy, etc. And so, your statement, that you're interested in having consulates throughout Iraq, I think is brilliant, as well as the work of the Pentagon and their efforts. But since we're on this Foreign Operations subcommittee, and Madam Chairman and I are also on the Defense subcommittee, but - as is Mr. Cole. I want to say that that is an investment we must continue to make, lest we ... throw away all of the sacrifices, throw away all of the sacrifices that this nation's put in.

Clinton:

I agree with you, Congressman. The things that keep me up at night, which are many and growing, I think about 5 or 10 years, seeing a situation like we were describing develop, where at least Southern [Iraq] or, you know, maybe all the way up to Kirkuk, is largely under Iranian influence and they have lost their chance to be an independent, Arab, nationalistic democracy. And people say to us: well, what were you all thinking? I mean, you had this incredible war, you put all of this money in, you lost all of these lives, you have all of these veterans who are suffering - what were you thinking? And I, you know, I don't want to answer that question saying: well, you know we decided once the military left, we left. Because I think that would be a really great tragedy and unfair to all the sacrifice that this country, and particularly our brave young men and women, have made.

Rothman:

Thank you, Madam Secretary. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

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