

Press Releases: Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook With Traveling Press

Special Briefing
Brian Hook

Senior Policy Advisor to the Secretary of State and Special Representative
for Iran

Brussels, Belgium
December 4, 2018

MR HOOK: (In progress.) We discussed Iran's missile testing, Iran's missile proliferation, and I encouraged the European Union to make progress on missile proliferation, and there's many different ways you can do that. So we had a very good discussion about that. It's – even if one stipulates that Iran is in compliance with the deal, one –

QUESTION: Do you stipulate that, by the way?

MR HOOK: There's nothing to suggest they're not in compliance.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR HOOK: The IAEA has been – so even if you stipulate that Iran is in compliance with the deal, that should not be – the deal should not be an obstacle to addressing missile testing and proliferation by the Iranian regime. It's important that we not – the Iran nuclear deal is a modest and temporary nonproliferation plan of action. That can't come at the expense of missile proliferation or other threats to peace and security. So it's important that we address these threats comprehensively and not get sort of sidetracked by the Iran nuclear deal.

Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz again. The Islamic Republic of Iran does not control the Strait of Hormuz. The strait is an international waterway. The United States will continue to work with our partners to ensure frequent navigation and the free flow of commerce in international waterways.

There we are. We're also very troubled – very troubled – by the discovery of Lebanese Hizballah tunnels inside of Israel's territory. This is another example of Iran's revolutionary foreign policy that is expansionist and destabilizing for the Middle East, when Iranian-backed Hizballah is digging

tunnels into another country beneath their borders. So we condemn this activity and support Israel in its military operations to address these tunnels.

That's it.

QUESTION: You – just on that last thing. You were in the meeting last night with the prime minister?

MR HOOK: No, it was a one-on-one meeting.

QUESTION: Oh, okay. Well, do you know anything about the meeting?

MR HOOK: Did we put out a statement on –

MODERATOR: We put out a readout.

QUESTION: Yeah, but it wasn't very specific.

QUESTION: Nope.

QUESTION: Very interestingly. Highly coincidental that within hours of the meeting they launched this operation.

MODERATOR: You can ask the Secretary about that this evening.

MR HOOK: Yeah.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR HOOK: You should ask.

QUESTION: All right. Then can I ask you about the – on the Euros and missiles? So did they accept – are they on board with the premise that even though they're still in the deal and they're still giving sanctions relief, that they will go after missiles because they're not included in the deal?

MR HOOK: I would say –

QUESTION: Yeah, you pivoted from saying "we discussed" to suddenly saying "we have to address" blah blah blah.

MR HOOK: Well, as you – since many of you covered the supplemental negotiations that we worked on, we discussed Iran's missile testing and proliferation extensively. And we had reached agreement in the supplemental negotiations to include intercontinental ballistic missiles. We were not able to agree on the sunset clauses, but we had full agreement on missiles.

For 12 years – as I said yesterday on the plane, for 12 years the Security Council has said that Iran should – in various formulations – that Iran needs to stop testing and proliferating ballistic missiles. This is a policy of the – this is a global consensus. I don't hear anyone in the world arguing that Iran should continue testing and proliferating ballistic missiles.

QUESTION: Well, Iran.

MR HOOK: (Laughter.) Great point.

QUESTION: You do hear that, right? Or are you just –

MR HOOK: No, we've heard that. Their actions speak louder than words. So there is a clear global consensus that Iran needs to stop, and Iran continues to defy the UN Security Council and defy the international community on this. And I think that there is, and as Iran – Iran has not diminished its missile tests during the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal, and I think the world is increasingly recognizing this.

QUESTION: Right. Okay. I just –

MR HOOK: So it's easier to address the threat because Iran continues to defy –

QUESTION: Let me – I'll stop at this – but let me just – you said that the deal should not be an obstacle to dealing with missiles.

MR HOOK: Correct.

QUESTION: But do the Europeans see it that way, too? I mean, or are they concerned that if they impose sanctions on something or someone for missiles who are covered under the relief from the deal, that that would be a violation on their part?

MR HOOK: I would put it this way, that the Iran nuclear deal focuses on one threat that Iran presents to international peace and security, the nuclear piece. The theory of the case is that you can't take on too much, so you can only focus on one threat to get a deal done. The people that negotiated the deal never once said that this will prevent nations from addressing the nonnuclear threats.

QUESTION: No, I know. That was a selling point for it.

MR HOOK: That's a selling point. Since Iran has expanded its threats to peace and security in every category during the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal, it is incumbent upon all nations – especially those that still support the deal – to not ignore the escalating threats. And no threat is more escalatory in recent months than the missile proliferation – year – months and years.

QUESTION: Brian, they blame you, basically – the Europeans – because by getting out – by ignoring the deal, by getting out of the deal, by breaking the deal that the United States signed –

MR HOOK: There were no signatures.

QUESTION: Well, the United States agreed to –

MR HOOK: In the last administration.

QUESTION: In the last administration.

MR HOOK: It was a political commitment, which the Obama administration, in a letter to Congress – that is a political commitment. It's not a treaty; it's not legally binding.

QUESTION: By getting out of the deal that the United States agreed to –

MR HOOK: That's fair. Well, that President Obama agreed to –

QUESTION: That President Obama agreed to on behalf of the United States.

QUESTION: He was elected president.

MR HOOK: Yes, I know that, right. It's not a treaty, though, right. Keep going.

QUESTION: – that –

MR HOOK: This is a long wind up.

QUESTION: Well, I didn't mean it to be.

QUESTION: And you'll hit it out of the park, I'm sure.

QUESTION: That you have imposed on Iran penalties, obviously, that were not agreed to under the deal, and thus the Europeans do not see it as possible or in their interests or in the interests of surviving the deal to impose more penalties outside of the deal for such things as ballistic missiles. Yes, they were willing to do it, as long as you stayed in the deal. That was the point of the supplemental agreement. By getting out of the deal, you have prevented the world from really addressing Iran's ballistic missile program. What – that's their point of view. How do you respond to that? This is basically your fault.

MR HOOK: Yeah, during the – from the time the JCPOA – during its negotiation and implementation, up until the time the President left the deal in May, Iran did not diminish its missile testing. And during that same period, no nation – the EU and other parties to the deal did not take action against Iran's missile program. So the neglect of this threat predates the President leaving the Iran deal.

Now that we are out of the deal, we have a – much more freedom to use the diplomatic tools at our disposal to address the entire range of Iran's threats. We think that is the correct posture. We have more freedom to address their threats, and it puts us in a position of leverage to try to get an even better deal.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Brian, yesterday you said we would like to see the European Union move sanctions that target Iran's missile program. Did you, in your meetings today, see any indication that the EU was any closer than it was yesterday to

moving on sanctions that target Iran's missile program?

MR HOOK: I think there is a growing appreciation among European nations, given Iran's expanding missile program and the bomb plot in Paris, Denmark, the assassination plot, the smuggling of heroin through Italy – that's just in recent sort of memory. That doesn't also account for Iran giving Assad billions, which then of course is one of the factors that creates a refugee crisis that deeply affects Europe. So I think the Europeans increasingly understand that it is possible to address these threats that exist outside of the nuclear deal. The nuclear deal, from its inception in the last administration, was never meant to be an obstacle to address any other threat that Iran presents to peace and security.

QUESTION: Yes, but did you see any indication in your meetings today –

MR HOOK: We are making progress, yeah. We're making progress.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Okay. So at UNGA in New York, the President told me – when I asked him how progress was being made in regards to the Europeans on the Iran nuclear deal – he suggested that we as America and our safety and structure didn't even rely on Europeans, per se, to cripple Iran's economy. And we are seeing it have a big effect.

MR HOOK: Yeah.

QUESTION: So in saying that, how important is it really to get our European allies to join us in this effort?

MR HOOK: Given the role of the United States in the global financial system, it gives us enormous diplomatic leverage to address threats to peace and security. We are doing that in the context of the Iranian regime, and we have been very pleased with the success we have had since May to impose economic costs on Iran for being an outlaw regime. We are very well positioned to deepen Iran's economic isolation until Iran decides to change its behavior and starts behaving like a normal country and not like a revolutionary regime. As Kissinger said, Iran needs to decide whether it's a cause or a country.

Yeah.

QUESTION: I wanted to go back to what you mentioned at the top about sanctions. Can you get into a little bit more about the nature of the conversations and pushback from Europeans who don't really want to go along with a lot of these sanctions? And you did the oil waivers, that kind of thing. I'm just kind of curious to get a sense of where their heads are at in terms of following the U.S.

MR HOOK: Following the U.S. on?

QUESTION: On sanctions. On the reimposition that –

MR HOOK: Oh. Well, what we found is for us, for our sanctions, they affect corporations. And we have seen only full compliance by European corporations who are connected to the international financial system. And we just don't see any daylight between the United States and European companies.

QUESTION: However, there is with the governments.

MR HOOK: The governments who are still in the deal, yes, we have a disagreement over the efficacy of the Iran nuclear deal, and we didn't think – we think it's a deficient deal that needs to be replaced by a new and better deal. While we are out of the deal, it allows us to do everything we can to starve the militias that Iran funds and to start choking its revenues for money to Assad, money to Hizballah, Hamas, the Houthis, cyberattacks, threats to close the Strait of Hormuz, all that.

QUESTION: At the top, you said that during – you said that during a supplemental agreement, you had full agreement on – supplemental talks, you had full agreement on ballistic missiles.

MR HOOK: To include ICBMs.

QUESTION: To –

MR HOOK: Yeah. I mean, ICBMs needed to be included in the – because ICBMs and a nuclear program always walk arm in arm. They're never separate.

QUESTION: So was there an agreement on how to counteract the Iranian missile program in the spring? Did you have that piece in place and are the Europeans now declining to pursue that in this context?

MR HOOK: No. I would separate these things. I – just in the context of negotiating, seeking a supplemental agreement to address the three deficiencies that the President identified around it – we need a stronger inspections regime, we need ICBMs, and we need to have the elimination of the sunset clauses. Those are the three areas of focus. The President also asked for – it would be helpful if we could address these other areas around regional aggression and the other threats, which we talked about. We would spend half the day talking about the nuclear piece and the other half of the day talking about the non-nuclear threats. And this is what I've said for a long time: We share the same threat assessment. There is a difference of opinion about the Iran nuclear deal. In the context of just trying to address the deficiency of the ICBMs, we were able to get agreement that ICBMs need to be a part of it, but then we couldn't get agreement on sunsets and so we're out of the deal.

QUESTION: But does that mean – forgive me if I'm being dense here – does that mean that there's a – you have – you've had agreement on two of these three areas in May. Was there –

MR HOOK: Yeah, I think as I've said –

QUESTION: Was there – is it on the shelf? It's not being implemented now, even though you'd subsequently agreed on it earlier? (Inaudible.)

MR HOOK: No, it's separate. No, it's not – it's not, it's – I would separate what we're talking about now with the supplemental agreement, and there's a lot that's – look, that ended in May. We have since had a number of developments since May on Iran's missile program. On Thursday, when I was at Bolling and unveiling the new missiles that we found, the missile test on Saturday, and then the other incidents that have happened in Europe have created a new climate, I think, for us to make more progress on the non-nuclear issues.

QUESTION: Does that –

MR HOOK: Jessica? What?

QUESTION: I have a question on – so you mentioned that you – there are three main areas. Is this – when you announced you were leaving the deal in May, there were 12 concessions, which included regional interference. Have you dropped that?

MR HOOK: The what? The –

QUESTION: There were 12 – Pompeo –

QUESTION: There were 12.

MR HOOK: Yeah, the 12, yeah.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: That included not –

QUESTION: But now you're talking about three.

QUESTION: – interfering anymore in this.

QUESTION: Twelve and three.

QUESTION: And now you say that there are just three.

MR HOOK: No, no, no. You've got to separate the supplemental agreement from what everything that came after. I'm not – it's – after the President left the deal, it put us in a position to announce a new Iran strategy. That includes no enrichment, a whole range of things. So those 12 is the comprehensive strategy that you need to apply in the case of Iran.

QUESTION: Would the U.S. be willing to enter into a new deal if it didn't include regional interference?

MR HOOK: I'm not going to get into those hypotheticals.

QUESTION: Can I just ask you –

MR HOOK: We are seeking a comprehensive deal that addresses nukes, missiles, terrorism, everything in the Secretary's 12 areas. When the prior – you have to remember, the President outlined the three areas well prior to – six

months prior – more than six months prior to when Secretary Pompeo gave his speech.

QUESTION: You –

MS NAUERT: We're going to have to wrap this up. Brian's got another engagement, so –

QUESTION: You've correctly identified that ICBMs have been agreed to.

MR HOOK: Well, roughly. I mean, when I say agreed to, we have made – yeah.

QUESTION: Yeah, but look, so the Europeans were notoriously resistant on short and medium-range, but you do not seem to be – you seem to be pushing that as well. So in – are you saying that – when you say you think you're making progress, are the Europeans willing to consider less than ICBM range missiles?

MR HOOK: I'm not going to get into the specifics of it, but we did have a medium – we had a couple of days ago the launch of a medium-range ballistic missile.

QUESTION: I know, but –

MR HOOK: And so I –

QUESTION: – the Europeans, even before when you're talking about when you had an agreement, weren't agreeing on medium.

QUESTION: That's true.

MR HOOK: I'm not going to get into the specifics of where we are now.

QUESTION: Can I quickly just ask you something –

MS NAUERT: You're going to have to – wait, guys.

QUESTION: Wait, Michael – Michael hasn't asked –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: You're going to have to be the last one, because Brian's –

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Michael Birnbaum from *The Washington Post* in Brussels.

MS NAUERT: Brian's already an hour – five minutes late (inaudible).

QUESTION: That's all right, let me ask one more.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS NAUERT: Yeah, go ahead.

QUESTION: He hasn't had a question. He hasn't had one.

QUESTION: But it's sort of outsider's question, because I live here in Brussels. I spend all my time talking to European officials, not American ones. And there's so much energy here that's given in to thinking about SPV and thinking about ways to preserve the JCPOA, but basically to undermine the American attempt to blow up the deal. How are you making progress? Like, in what areas are you making progress when so much bandwidth here in Brussels and in Europe is devoted to undoing what the Trump administration has done? I'm trying to sort of square the circle a little bit. How do you have them try to undermine your decisions on the one hand and work with them on the other?

MR HOOK: I'm not sure what you're – can you give me that question again? I'm not sure – you're saying that –

QUESTION: Well, it seems like most –

MR HOOK: They don't have enough bandwidth to do both at the same time?

QUESTION: It seems like most of their Iran focus is devoted to preserving the JCPOA, undermining your sort of measures on Iran. I'm just wondering how you can make progress on the one hand in pushing on all of these sort of supplemental issues while their –

MR HOOK: Because we –

QUESTION: – main energetic focus seems to be on preserving the JCPOA.

MR HOOK: Because you can do both things at the same time. We share the same threat assessment. They're still in the deal and so they have equities in the deal that they are managing. We don't have those equities anymore. We do at the same time share the same threat assessment about Iran's missile proliferation.

MS NAUERT: Okay.

MR HOOK: Got to get going?

MS NAUERT: Right, bye. Thanks, Brian.

MR HOOK: Okay, thank you, bye.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.