

Leading Democrat on Senate Foreign Relations Committee says administration stance on Iran nukes sounds like Tehran talking points

During a hearing at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Ranking Member Senator Robert Menendez (D -NJ) said "the more I hear from the administration in its quotes, the more it sounds like talking points that come straight out of Tehran."

Menendez's comments come a day after President Obama delivered his annual State of the Union address, in which the President vowed that he would veto any conditional sanctions legislation. In his State of the Union speech, President Obama said that "we've halted the progress of its nuclear program." However, many experts say the Iranian nuclear program has not been halted. The Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) allows Iran to continue to enrich uranium to 3.5% and according to the Institute for Science and International Security, Iran has produced enough enriched uranium for almost two bombs in the last year. The JPOA did not halt Iran's ballistic missile development, the Associated Press reports that Iran has continued construction for the Arak reactor which is now 87% complete, and President Rouhani recently announced that Iran will build two new reactors. To restore the P5+1's leverage, Senators Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Menendez are co-sponsoring the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act of 2015, which would re-impose sanctions waived against Iran during the interim agreement, if negotiations fail to produce an agreement by July 6th. The legislation would include no new sanctions during the course of the negotiations extension and would also include a presidential waiver. During the Senate hearing, Senator Menendez claimed that Iran's "breakout time is shorter than the amount of time it would take to make new sanctions." Additionally, Senator Corker (R -TN) stated that he wants to pursue legislation that would allow Congress to weigh in on any potential deal with Iran. However, Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that the administration opposes a congressional up-or-down vote on a nuclear deal.