

WASHINGTON
DEC 11 2009

Dear Mr. Chairman:

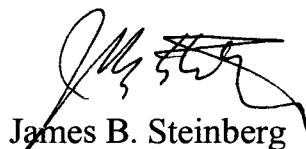
I wanted to follow up on our conversations regarding Iran, and possible sanctions legislation to be taken up by the Senate (S. 2799). We share Congress's concerns on Iran and its nuclear program, and the need to take decisive action. One of the top national security priorities for the Obama Administration is to deny Iran a nuclear weapons capability. As we discussed, we are pursuing this objective through a dual track strategy of engagement and pressure; and we are engaged in intensive multilateral efforts to develop pressure track measures now. It is in the spirit of these shared objectives that I write to express my concern about the timing and content of this legislation.

As I testified before the Congress in October, it is our hope that any legislative initiative would preserve and maximize the President's flexibility, secure greater cooperation from our partners in taking effective action, and ultimately facilitate a change in Iranian policies. However, we are entering a critical period of intense diplomacy to impose significant international pressure on Iran. This requires that we keep the focus on Iran. At this juncture, I am concerned that this legislation, in its current form, might weaken rather than strengthen international unity and support for our efforts. In addition to the timing, we have serious substantive concerns, including the lack of flexibility, inefficient monetary thresholds and penalty levels, and blacklisting that could cause unintended foreign policy consequences.

I have asked Department staff to prepare for and discuss with your staff revisions that could address these concerns on timing and content. I am hopeful that we can work together to achieve our common goals.

I hope that consideration of this bill could be delayed to the new year so as not to undermine the Administration's diplomacy at this critical juncture. I look forward to working together to achieve our common goals, and I will stay in close contact with you as our diplomatic efforts proceed.

Sincerely,



James B. Steinberg

The Honorable
John F. Kerry, Chairman,
Committee on Foreign Relations,
United States Senate.