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Supporting Sanctions Against Russia, Iran, and North Korea (H.R. 3364)

*Excerpts of remarks by Rep. Chris Smith
July 25, 2017*

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H.R. 3364, the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, introduced by my good friend, Chairman Ed Royce. I'm proud to be a co-sponsor. This bill brings together a critical arsenal of stiff and timely sanctions trained at some of the gravest national security threats our country faces today.

The Trump Administration was absolutely right in early February to put Iran "on notice" regarding its continued testing of ballistic missiles. This bill underscores that warning by imposing expanded sanctions against Iran's missile program—demonstrating that the United States will not sit idly by as Iran augments its ability to blackmail Israel and other allies.

The stakes could hardly be higher. Iran possesses the largest ballistic missile program in the region and its medium-range ballistic missiles are already able to strike Israel and our allies and installations in the Gulf from deep within Iranian territory. Iran's growing space launch program—a thinly-veiled testing scheme for intercontinental ballistic missiles—is cause for greater alarm still.

Iran is also the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism. By requiring the imposition of terror sanctions on the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, H.R. 3364 treats the IRGC as what it truly is: Iran's principle means of exporting terrorism around the world, particularly to Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Bahrain.

The U.S. cannot tolerate this brinksmanship and blackmail. Iran dreams of nothing less than regional hegemony and Israel's annihilation. There is no room for compromise with such an adversary. Now is the time to act: Iran is entrenching its influence in Syria and Iraq and insuring these gains with the credibility of its missile threat and militant proxies. We must pass this bill to bring maximum pressure to bear against a mounting threat.

Importantly, this bill also authorizes the imposition of sanctions on individuals responsible for Iran's horrifying human rights abuses. In May, the State Department reported to Congress that: "The Iranian regime's repression of its own people includes reports of over **800 political prisoners**, composed of peaceful civic activists, journalists, women's rights activists, religious and ethnic minorities, and opposition political figures."

This bill would also draw increased attention to Iran's despicable practice of arresting American citizens to use them as bargaining chips. On Friday, the Trump Administration rightfully called Iran out for using these detentions as "a tool of state policy" and threatened "new and serious" consequences if this practice continues. We must not forget the lives and families of Robert Levinson, Siamak and Baquer Namazi, Xiyue Wang, and others that have been torn apart by Iran's cynical schemes.

Mr. Speaker, regarding Russia, the Putin government's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, indiscriminate bombing in Syria, and threatening behavior toward our NATO allies, above all in the Baltics, makes it among the worst actors on the global stage today. Putin's government has passed from threats to aggressive action against our friends, allies and innocent civilians abroad. And it did so long ago, when it invaded Georgia in 2008.

I was there, in Tbilisi, several weeks after that invasion began, to work to secure the exit of two young children, constituents of mine, trapped behind Russian lines in South Ossetia. I will never forget the quiet courage of the Georgian people in Tbilisi – not entirely surprised by Putin's invasion – they were too wise for that – uncertain whether the Russian army would proceed to Tbilisi, and determined to soldier on in defense of their country.

And then in 2014 the Russian government annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine – each of these incursions was marked by massive human rights violations, violence toward anyone suspected of being unsympathetic to the Russian imperialist cause, and created massive humanitarian crises of displaced persons, which the Russian government did nothing to relieve.

These acts of aggression underscore the seriousness with which we must take the Russian government's testing of our limits and our will, by buzzing our ships and planes, harassing our diplomats, and intimidating our allies – as it does for example with the Zapad exercises set to take place in September near the Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian borders.

We know from experience that the best way to maintain the peace and keep our country secure is to respond strongly to Russian expansionism and intimidation attempts – this sanctions bill does just that.

The large number of political assassinations that have scarred Russian public life since Putin arrived on the scene – the most notorious but not the only attack on the rights of Russian citizens for which the Putin government is responsible. These brutal crimes only underscore the need to respond strongly to Putin’s attempts to intimidate us and our allies.

Congress has responded strongly to Putin’s aggressions and crimes before, for example with the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law and Accountability Act and the Global Magnitsky legislation, of which I was the House chief sponsor, taking the lessons of the earlier act and applied them globally, while in its name further memorializing the heroic sacrifice of Sergei Magnitsky. The Magnitsky legislation was so strongly detested by the Putin government that in early 2013, having cosponsored the original Magnitsky legislation, the Russian government refused to issue me a visa to visit Russia to work on international child adoption issues. A State Department official commented to me at the time that as far he knew, I was the first Congressman denied a visa since the Brezhnev era.

So, in addition to enacting this new legislation, I want to join Vladimir Kara-Murza’s call that the Magnitsky legislation continue to be implemented energetically and fully. Kara-Murza is a Russian democracy activist, who twice was nearly killed by sophisticated poisons while visiting Russia – he testified for me at the Helsinki Commission after the first poisoning attempt, in October 2015. Many of the Putin government’s murders are motivated by economic crimes and implementation of the Magnitsky legislation should also include U.S. government advocacy on behalf of U.S. investors defrauded by Russian expropriations – the Yukos oil company is the most notorious case of this.

As to North Korea – a gulag masquerading as a country – we must cut off all economic lifelines to Kim Jong-un and punish Pyongyang's clients and its enablers. A regime that murders Otto Warmbier does not deserve respect and should be considered an imminent threat to the US and its allies because of its nuclear proliferation.

We cannot negotiate our way out of these strategic problems. Carrots have not worked, we need bigger sticks.

We know sanctions are working. Thae Yong Ho (Thay Young Ho)—North Korea’s former deputy ambassador to Britain and the highest ranking defector in twenty years—said that international sanctions are beginning to squeeze the regime. He also said that the spread of information from the outside world is having a real and impact. So it shouldn’t be a surprise that South Korea has reported that high-level defections are surging.

This legislation provides crucial tools and I support them wholeheartedly--as I supported them in May of this year.

The Trump Administration will find that it can use the tools we offer today to much greater use than did the last White House. With hundreds of thousands of North Korean laborers abroad—sending as much as \$2 billion a year back to the regime in hard currency—we should look at targeting this expatriate labor and the governments and corporations that employ them.

Loopholes in our sanctions on North Korea's shipping and financial sectors must be closed. And when we discover that foreign banks have helped Kim Jong-un skirt sanctions – as those in China have repeatedly done – we must give those banks and businesses a stark choice: do business with Kim Jong-un or the U.S.

Cut off Kim Jong-un's economic lifelines, punish those who keep his murderous regime afloat, and signal to China and its client state in North Korea that the era of "strategic patience" is finally over.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to strongly support this critical measure at a perilous moment for our country and the rest of the planet.