

[Iran Threat Reduction Act Actually Enhances](#)

[Threat of War](#)

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Congress is taking up dangerous legislation which appears to be designed to pave the way for war by taking the unprecedented step of effectively preventing any

kind of U.S. diplomatic contact with Iran. The [Iran Threat Reduction Act of 2011](#) (H.R. 1905), sponsored by the right-wing chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, contains a provision (Section 601, subsection (c)) which would put into law a restriction whereby

"No person employed with the United States Government may contact in an official or unofficial capacity any person that. . . is an agent, instrumentality, or official of, is affiliated with, or is serving as a representative of the Government of Iran;"

Never in the history of this country has Congress ever restricted the right of the White House or State Department to meet with representatives of a foreign state, even in wartime. If this measure passes, it will establish a dangerous precedent whereby Congress would likely follow with similar legislation effectively forbidding any contact with Palestinians, Cubans and others.

Despite not having formal diplomatic ties since 1979, there has been frequent low-level contact between the two governments on such issues as combatting drug smuggling and Salafi terrorists. Recent examples include talks which facilitated cooperation in suppressing the Taliban and freeing three American hikers held in an Iranian prison. Such contacts would no longer be possible under this bill.

More seriously, the legislation appears to be designed to push the country toward a military conflict with Iran. History has shown that governments that refuse to even talk with each other are far more likely to go to war.

The bill passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee last week and, with 349 co-sponsors from both parties, is almost certain to pass the House of Representatives as a whole. As is often the case with legislation dealing with foreign affairs that puts limits on executive behavior, there is clause allowing for a presidential waiver. It is very limited, however, allowing the White House to waive the requirement only



"... if the president determines and so reports to the appropriate congressional committees 15 days prior to the exercise of waiver authority that failure to exercise such waiver authority would pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the vital national security interests of the United States."

The problem is that diplomatic encounters -- particularly with countries with which the United States has tense relations -- often need to be arranged in less than a 15-day period. The entire Cuban missile crisis lasted only 13 days, for example. In the event of a crisis that threatens a military confrontation between the United States and Iran, the Obama administration would have to wait more than two weeks before having any contact with any Iranian officials, which by then could be too late.

Another problem is that meetings with governments with which the United States has no diplomatic relations are usually arranged secretly through back channels. Unfortunately, the odds that none of the 26 Republican members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee would leak news of such a meeting to [Fox News](#) or some other media outlet are rather slim. The relatively moderate elements within Iran's factious regime would presumably not want to risk any meetings with Americans becoming known to hard-liners. Indeed, their personal safety could be at risk if found out. Similarly, to avoid attacks from [Republicans](#) prior to elections, the Obama administration would presumably want to avoid making such meetings public as well. Fortunately, senior diplomats and intelligence officials are speaking out against this push for war. As veteran CIA analyst and Georgetown University professor [Paul Pillar](#) put it, "This legislation is another illustration of the tendency to think of diplomacy as some kind of reward for the other guy, rather than what it really is: a tool for our side."

Similarly, veteran diplomats [Thomas Pickering and William Luers](#) observed, "Besides raising serious constitutional issues over the separation of powers, this preposterous law would make it illegal for the U.S. to know its enemy," a principle which has been understood by strategic planners since first articulated by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* in the 6th century B.C.

Another problematic clause in the bill, contained in the same sub-section, states that *"No person employed with the United States Government may contact in an official or unofficial capacity any person that... presents a threat to the United States or is affiliated with terrorist organizations."*

Not only could what constitutes a "threat" to the United States or an "affiliate" with a "terrorist organization" be interpreted rather broadly, it could restrict investigation of possible terrorist attacks. It would have made illegal the recent sting operation that foiled the alleged assassination plot against the Saudi ambassador, for example.

The march to war with Iran appears to have the support a sizable number of liberal [Democrats](#). Indeed, more than 40 members of the so-called "Progressive Caucus" have signed on as co-sponsors of the bill, including: Karen Bass, Robert Brady, Corrine Brown, Yvette Clark, William Clay, Emmanuel Cleaver, David Cicilline, Steve Cohen, Elijah Cummings, Peter DeFazio, Rosa DeLauro, Sam Farr, Chaka Fattah, Bob Filner, Barney Frank, Janice Hahn, Mazie Hirono, Michael Honda, Jesse Jackson, Jr., Hank Johnson, Marcy Kaptur, John Lewis, David Loebsack, Ben Ray Lujan, Carolyn Maloney, Ed Markey, Jerrold Nadler, Frank Pallone, Jared Polis, Charles Rangel, Laura Richardson, Lucille Roybal-Allard, Linda Sanchez, Jan Schakowsky, Louise Slaughter, Peter Welch, and Frederica Wilson.

It should be noted that these clauses were added to the bill by committee chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen at the end of October, subsequent to some of the co-sponsors signing on, yet so far no one has withdrawn their co-sponsorship. Unless the public mobilizes against this legislation, then, it will be passed and the risks of a disastrous war will be markedly increased