



## **Kerry, House committee at odds over Iran negotiations**

**By Tal Axelrod**

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WASHINGTON – Secretary of State John Kerry responded to claims on Wednesday from skeptical lawmakers that the State Department is soft in its nuclear negotiations with Iran.

Testifying in front of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Kerry declared that Iran has already mastered the uranium enrichment process in the past several years and that as a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, it has the right to do so.

However, Kerry told the committee, Iran will not be able to produce a nuclear weapon under any circumstances.

Republicans expressed concern that Iran is able to continue enriching uranium and spinning centrifuges.

“I’m hearing less about dismantlement, and more about the permanence of Iran’s nuclear program,” said Committee Chairman Ed Royce, R-Calif. “Also, it is still illicitly procuring nuclear technology and was caught testing a new generation of supersonic centrifuges.”

Both Kerry and the lawmakers demanded Iran reveal all nuclear facilities and allow unlimited International Atomic Energy Agency inspections to prevent such problems.

But Kerry urged Congress to allow the diplomatic process to take its course before resorting to stronger measures.

“But I tell you it’s worth trying before going to more extreme measures that ask Americans yet again to put themselves in harm’s way,” he said. “The key here is, is this a peaceful program, and are there measures in place to make sure it’s peaceful? Those are the standards we’re trying to apply.”

Kerry was quick to praise the progress so far, claiming that the Iranians have responded to demands and the timetable for weapons-grade enrichment has been pushed back several years.

“We don’t lose one option we have today. Not one option...including the military option” he said. “We actually expand the period of time during which we can act.”

Despite Kerry's remarks, members of both parties remained skeptical of the progress the negotiations have made and Iran's good will in the future. Rep. Ted Deutch, D-Fla., cited the lack of Iranian transparency on past bomb-making operations as evidence that the country is untrustworthy and a deal may collapse.

Some say the bipartisan criticism of negotiations may be a safety net for politicians.

"Nobody ever got kicked out of Congress for being too tough on Iran," said Justin Logan, an expert at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. "So there's really no cost to saying provocative things..."

Kerry was also grilled about Iran at a Senate subcommittee on Tuesday.

The current round of negotiations is set to expire in July if there is no agreement or extension, but Kerry claimed people should be hopeful for a deal.

Logan, Cato's director of foreign policy studies, said it is encouraging that Kerry is sticking with the talks even after bipartisan criticism and failure to achieve a final agreement.

"The fact that Kerry [and] some of the negotiators are really incurring political costs to defend the idea of a deal suggests to me that they believe they're going to get a deal," he said.