



**Opening Statement**  
**Responding to Iran's Nuclear Ambitions: Next Steps**  
**September 19, 2006**  
**Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome our witnesses.

As we meet, the President is at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly. Iran's nuclear program will be high on his agenda.

Since our last hearing on Iran, the Administration has taken significant steps in the direction many of us recommended. We joined with other members of the P-5 plus Germany in offering a package of incentives to Iran. It was conditioned on Tehran verifiably suspending its uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities. We also offered to join France, Germany, and Britain at the negotiating table with Iran.

Iran, not surprisingly, delayed in responding. When it finally did, on August 22nd, it was neither a "yes" nor a "no." Iran also failed to comply with the deadline set forth in UN Security Council resolution 1696 for suspending its uranium enrichment activity by August 31st.

So this is an incredibly important moment – and a real test for this administration's diplomacy, for the U.N.'s tenacity and for our partners' seriousness.

What will it take to get negotiations started, with an Iranian suspension of enrichment and reprocessing activities? If we get that far, what will it take to get Iran to suspend those activities not for weeks or months but for years – which is the only way it can begin to regain the world's trust? And if we don't get that far, what will it take to impose U.N. sanctions – and what good will they do?

Simply put, what is the administration's game plan?

I hope that we also use this hearing to consider the larger strategic picture. There is a pervasive sense in the Middle East that Iran is becoming an increasingly assertive power – and so a growing problem. This summer's war in Lebanon—ignited by Hezbollah but fueled by Iranian cash and arms, Iran's continuing support to Shi'a militias in Iraq, its

President's outrageous statements about the Holocaust and Israel, and its intransigence on its nuclear program are exhibits A, B, C and D.

Two US actions – a necessary war in Afghanistan and an optional one in Iraq – had the unintended consequence of removing Iran's greatest strategic threats, while tying our troops down. Add record oil prices to the mix—which have filled Tehran's coffers—and it is no surprise that Iran is feeling emboldened.

How should the United States respond to growing Iranian assertiveness? Should we build a containment policy with Iran's neighbors who do not want Iran to dominate the region?

How can we tap into the deep unhappiness in Iran with the current regime? While Iranians of all stripes support a nuclear program, they also differ on the price they are willing to pay for it.

The late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto once famously said that Pakistanis would “eat grass” in order to match India's nuclear weapon. I am not certain that all Iranians are ready to “eat grass” for nukes. Their number one priority is an improved economy and a better quality of life. We need to do a much better job appealing to those interests.

The incentives package offered in June is a good first step. But we should be much more explicit -- and much more direct -- in communicating the benefits Iranians can expect if their leaders suspend enrichment and end support for terrorism. We should also make clear the hardships they would face if their leaders remain defiant.

To that end, it is time to jettison the canard that negotiation equals legitimization. We've talked with North Korea, Libya, the USSR and China during the Cold War.

Now, our greatest allies against the theocracy in Tehran are the Iranian people. They admire America. But we never get our side of the argument into Iran – and into the minds of the people who, over time, have the power to change their government's course.

We should have confidence in the power of our ideas and ideals. Putting them front and center before the Iranian people is the best way to start a debate in Iran. Right now, they don't hear America's voice.

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