

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on
A Nuclear Iran: Challenges and Responses
March 2, 2006

The Committee on Foreign Relations meets today to examine the challenges posed by Iran's campaign to acquire nuclear weapons. After more than two years of negotiations, Iran's recent decisions to limit International Atomic Energy Agency inspections and restart uranium enrichment represent a fundamental challenge to global stability and efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation. If the international community cannot muster the cohesiveness and determination to stop the Iranian nuclear drive, we will have undermined the international non-proliferation regime, risked igniting a regional arms race in the Middle East, and allowed a government with close links to terrorist organizations to acquire nuclear weapons.

Iranian leaders deceived the international community about its nuclear activities for more than eighteen years. They have rejected compromises, and threatened to cut off oil and natural gas exports should the international community impose sanctions. According to State Department reports, the Iranian government continues to be one of the primary supporters of terrorism in the world. Iran has provided funding, weapons, and training to Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hizballah, and other designated foreign terrorist organizations.

Shi'ite dominated Iran continues to infiltrate and harden divisions among the ethnic and religious groups in Iraq, making the consolidation of a unified Iraqi government more difficult. Iran also supports a Syrian regime that has been implicated by United Nations investigators in the death of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Iran's President has explicitly threatened the existence of Israel and has denied the Holocaust, among other inflammatory statements. Earlier this year, Iranian leaders incited Muslims to destroy embassies and consulates in response to cartoons published in the Danish press.

These actions have underscored for the world the risks that would be associated with the Iranian government's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability. When Senator Coleman, Senator Voinovich, and I visited the United Nations in February, I told the Security Council that if Iran does not comply with U.N. Resolutions and arms agreements, the Security Council must apply strict and enforceable sanctions. I emphasized that decisions delayed over the course of months and years may be as harmful as no decisions at all. As options are considered, we must assess the effectiveness of various types of sanctions in achieving our objectives. We will ask our witnesses if they can prescribe a set of sanctions that could both receive broad international support and alter Tehran's behavior.

I am hopeful that our government is thinking several diplomatic steps beyond the immediate preparations for securing a positive vote in the Security Council. I look forward to the insights of our witnesses on other diplomatic steps that the United States and its allies should be undertaking. The world does possess economic and diplomatic leverage on Iran. But exerting that leverage will require sacrifice from individual nations – particularly those who buy oil and natural gas from Iran. For this reason, U.S. diplomacy must reach beyond the European nations that have been the primary negotiators with Iran.

Our interest in considering sanctions is not in harming the Iranian people. Sadly, they are victims of a repressive regime that is increasingly corrupt and unresponsive. Iranians do not want their country to be an outcast among the world's nations. They deserve a government that is legitimate and devoted to the people's interest.

There are reformers inside and outside of Iran who want to bring change, but we should be realistic about the possibilities for political transformation or internal regime change. We do not have indications that the unelected regime faces short-term political competition from a popular movement. Nevertheless, we should seek opportunities to speak directly to the Iranian people and to improve our means of communicating with them. We should understand that having lived through a brutal and devastating war with Iraq in the 1980s, most Iranians fear a return to war. This fear is being exploited by the government in its campaign to justify nuclear weapons and distract Iranians from the economic hardships that they have faced for decades.

Although Iranians are patriotic and proud of their identity, few have invested their loyalties in the unelected clerics who control power. Our message to the Iranian people, many of whom have a positive view of the United States and the West, should be that we do not want war. Rather we want to see an economically reinvigorated Iran based on increased personal freedoms and interaction with the outside world. Pursuit of nuclear weapons by the Iranian regime is distancing the Iranian people from this goal.

We are pleased to welcome an outstanding panel with deep experience on Iranian issues. Dr. Ronald Lehman is Director of the Center for Global Security Research at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory; Dr. Patrick Clawson is the Deputy Director for Research at the Washington Institute for near East Policy; and Dr. Ray Takeyh is a Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

We look forward to the analysis and recommendations of our expert witnesses.

Before we proceed, the Committee is also pleased to welcome our friend and colleague Senator Rick Santorum, who will make comments about his legislation, S. 333, the Iran Freedom and Support Act. We appreciate his willingness to be with us today to share his thoughts about the situation in Iran and the intent of his legislation.

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