

U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein
“BREAKING THE US-IRAN STALEMATE”
Hearing Statement
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal
Services, and International Security
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- Prepared Remarks -

For several years, I have been interested in trying to be a constructive force for peace and stability in the Middle East, which is the “powder keg” in which nations and values collide.

I have watched as the Iraq War continues, Israeli and Palestinian peace remains elusive, Iran begins to exert itself in the region, and Sunni nations grow more and more concerned.

Iran, today – isolated and belligerent – constitutes both a present and future challenge to the stability and security of several concerned nations, as well as our own.

Last year, the U.S. indicated its alarm about Iran’s supplying of weapons and tactical support to Shia militias, and the Administration has called Iran public enemy number one in Iraq. Also Iran’s support of terrorist organizations, particularly Hezbollah and Hamas, remains of deep concern and continues unabated. And finally, the Government of Iran’s intransigent hatred of Israel and its willingness to deny Israel the right to exist is unacceptable and a major hurdle to peace and security in the region.

So, it is in this context that we must understand the number one question of the day – does Iran seek nuclear weapons and for what purpose?

In November 2007, the U.S. Intelligence Community released a National Intelligence Estimate on Iran’s nuclear program. It was an eye-opener and the source of major controversy.

The NIE’s first conclusion, front and center, was that the Intelligence Community judges, **“with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program....”** This signified a major shift from the judgments of past intelligence reviews.

A footnote in the NIE made clear that a nuclear weapons program has three parts:

- 1) The enrichment of fissile material;
- 2) A “weaponization” program to make that material into a weapon; and
- 3) A means to deliver the weapon.

The halt refers specifically to the weaponization part. The other two parts – the enrichment of fissile materials and the making of a delivery system -- remain serious concerns.

But equally as clear, the NIE judged – again with high confidence – **that until the fall of 2003, Iran was pursuing an illegal, covert nuclear weapons program.**

This was the strongest intelligence statement to date – and it is backed up with evidence in the classified text of the NIE – that Iran had a program. And that Iran’s leaders in Tehran could turn that program back on at any time.

Finally, the NIE made a statement that is central to the question of whether and how to approach Iran diplomatically. It said:

“Our assessment that the [nuclear] program probably was halted primarily in response to international pressure suggests Iran may be more vulnerable to influence on the issue than we judged previously.”

The NIE, in essence, suggests a window of opportunity to begin to engage Iran in discussion, and with the help of European and other allies, to see if Iran can be moved toward positive engagement with the Western World -- on this vital question, as well as other issues of concern.

So, this NIE presents the first opening for engagement.

The question is: how should we proceed with Iran? I believe we should begin to pursue a robust, diplomatic initiative with Iran on all issues and without pre-conditions.

Working with our European allies, the United Nations, and the International Atomic Energy Agency, we should put together a package of carrots and sticks that will serve as the basis for discussion with Iran.

The goal would be to convince Iran to:

- Permanently abandon any intention to re-start a nuclear weapons program;
- Allow International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors full access to all Iranian nuclear facilities and suspected nuclear facilities;
- Comply once again with the additional protocol to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty for intensified inspections by the IAEA. Iran had accepted this in 2003 and suspended compliance in 2005;
- Provide an accounting for all past nuclear activities and allow full transparency to international inspectors.
- Cease its support for the terrorist activities of Hamas and Hezbollah worldwide; and
- Promote stability and cease lethal support to militias in Iraq.

The key is this: we can recognize that Iran has a right to a peaceful, civilian nuclear energy program, but not to nuclear weapons.

Now, of course, there is no guarantee that these talks will succeed. It is likely to be a long and difficult road. But we are sure to fail if we do not at least try.

One proposal that deserves a closer look is one which was described to me by Iran's former ambassador to the United Nations. It is similar to one made by Ambassador Bill Luers, Secretary Thomas Pickering, and Jim Walsh. Mr. Walsh is on the second panel today.

The basic premise is this: Establish an "on the ground 24/7 International Consortium" to manage and monitor all aspects of nuclear activity. This is something that Iran might consider – as long as there was an openness on the part of the U.S. to discuss other issues as well. Participants could include the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, China, Russia, the United Nations, and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Such a proposal deserves serious consideration and could go a long ways toward building confidence on both sides.

I believe that an Iranian policy based on a military solution makes little sense. Only by talking and bringing to bear the best efforts of diplomacy can real progress be made.

The next Administration must evaluate anew our nation's approach to this Middle Eastern arena and evolve a new approach – one based on robust diplomacy, rather than threats of war. The process is likely to be difficult, but the rewards may well be significant. And one day, it could lead to a more stable and peaceful Middle East.

Thank you.