



**Statement of Senator Joseph R. Biden
Hearing on Iran
May 18, 2006**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

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

Yesterday, we heard from several well-informed witnesses on Iran's nuclear program. We also heard about Iran's motivations, the attitude of its population, and its vulnerability to economic sanctions. Today, I look forward to hearing about the options before us.

This hearing is timely. Our European allies are crafting a package of incentives and, if they fail, sanctions that will be presented to Iran.

Their first objective is to secure Chinese and Russian support for the entire package, so that Iran will understand that it faces UN Security Council mandated sanctions if it rejects the offer.

If Russia and China balk at supporting the package, there is talk of the US and Europe forming our own sanctions coalition. We heard yesterday that Iran is already feeling some pressure as investors and banks pull back from Iran in anticipation of sanctions.

But achieving broad-based agreement on sanctions cannot be the sum total of a diplomatic strategy for Iran. Sanctions are at best one tool to achieve our broader objectives, including ending Iran's uranium enrichment activities.

We need greater clarity on our precise goals – clarity the Bush Administration has thus far failed to provide.

If our goal is regime change, then that argues for an aggressive set of policies that will likely alienate most of friends, particularly in the wake of Iraq.

If our goal is to see Iran's threatening behavior end in the short-term -- while working for long-term change -- then that argues for a policy that many could likely support.

Yesterday, I recommended that President Bush respond to the recent letter sent by the Iranian President, but he should write to the man who has the final say in Iran – Ayatollah Khomeini.

I would make the letter public and I would include a call for direct talks with Iran – anywhere, anytime, with everything on the table.

We should be willing to talk about all the issues that divide us: the nuclear program, terrorism, Iraq, Afghanistan, Israeli-Palestinian peace, sanctions, and security.

We should lay out for Iran's leader – and especially for its people – what the future could look like if Iran renounces its nuclear ambitions and support for terrorism – and what the future could look like if it does not.

As I said yesterday, I don't know for certain how Iran would respond, but I believe that an offer of direct dialogue would place enormous pressure on the Iranian leadership -- from their own people and from the international community.

Iranian leaders would face a stark choice – reject the overture and risk complete isolation and an angry public, or accept it and start down a path that would require Iran to alter its nuclear ambitions.

Talking to Tehran would not reward bad behavior or legitimize the regime. Talking is something we have done with virtually every other country on earth, including unsavory regimes like the ones in North Korea and Libya.

Demonstrating that we made a serious attempt at diplomacy is also the best way to keep others on board for tougher actions if Iran fails to respond. If the Administration wants to convince our allies and others to place serious pressure on Iran, it must walk the extra diplomatic mile.

I look forward to the testimony.