

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for on
Iran
May 17, 2006

The Foreign Relations Committee meets today to examine the situation in Iran and options for U.S. policy. We will have a second hearing on this topic tomorrow. As the American people and policy makers debate our course in Iran, I am hopeful that this Committee can contribute by being a bipartisan forum for clarifying the diplomatic situation and evaluating policy options. Our intent is to inform our own policymaking role, as well as help stimulate constructive public debate.

President Bush has announced that the United States remains committed to exhausting all diplomatic options with respect to Iran. The United States and its allies at the United Nations have been pressing for multilateral diplomatic and economic sanctions under Chapter 7. There is widespread agreement that Iran has sought to deceive the international community about its nuclear intentions. Tehran's decision to move ahead with uranium enrichment was condemned by the international community, but efforts to attain a Security Council consensus on a firm response to Iran's actions have not been successful.

American policy in the near term will be defined by efforts to convince the international community of our commitment to diplomacy and to build a broad multilateral and international coalition against Iran's nuclear ambitions. I believe that this is the strategy that Iran fears most. Last minute negotiations, letters to President Bush, and feigned interest in compromises are just a few of the transparent efforts Tehran has undertaken to split the international community. We must overcome Iran's efforts with patient diplomatic spadework.

We have stated that no option is off the table. Although direct talks with Iran come with difficulties and risks, we cannot rule out their utility, particularly as they relate to our primary effort to build an international coalition. Secretary Baker's talks with Iraqi leaders in 1991 were distasteful, but proved to be a gesture that displayed America's hope for a peaceful settlement and built international equity for all steps in our response. The United States has the diplomatic prowess to attain a strong multilateral response and win the international debate. We must be prepared to commit the time, energy, and resources necessary to win this diplomatic battle.

Retaining all communication tools is also important because they may be necessary to avoid a tragic miscalculation by the Iranians. Analysts in our intelligence agencies and State Department do not regard the Tehran regime as irrational, but the framework for their decision-making is very different from our own. We must understand that they are interpreting our actions in ways that we do not always discern. If one overlays these perceptual differences with demagogic rhetoric, historic suspicion, and high political stakes, the possibility for miscalculation increases exponentially. Our policies and our communications must be clear, precise, and confident, without becoming inflexible. In some situations, this delicate diplomatic balance can best be achieved through direct communications.

Some have expressed frustration with the Administration's coalition-building approach and have advocated quick, punitive, and unilateral sanctions focused on international companies doing business in Iran. Secretary Rice has stated that such a policy: "Would complicate our ability to work

successfully with our allies to counter the threat posed by Iran. It would narrow in important ways the President's flexibility in the implementation of Iran sanctions, create tensions with countries whose help we need in dealing with Iran, and shift focus away from Iran's actions and spotlight differences between us and our allies. This could play into Iran's hands as it attempts to divide the U.S. from the international community as well as to sow division between the EU-3, China, and Russia."

Unilateral sanctions targeting European and Asian corporations do not appear to be an effective way to secure long-term commitments from their host governments on a multilateral approach to the threat posed by Iran. As such, they are likely to be counterproductive, as the Bush Administration has asserted.

As part of our diplomatic efforts, the Administration should consider how the NATO alliance might be utilized to strengthen our position. NATO is the principal defense and security organization of the trans-Atlantic community. NATO has become the preeminent strategic forum for broader security cooperation with Japan, Australia, and members of the Partnership for Peace in the Caucasus and Central Asia. It also is facilitating closer ties with North African countries through the Mediterranean Dialogue. NATO is the only entity that has successfully developed and implemented a strategy of deterrence and containment against a nuclear-armed enemy. The Alliance provides us with an effective and experienced infrastructure capable of supplementing our activities at the U.N. and implementing an international coalition's strategy towards Iran.

I would underscore a final point as the Congress and the Administration move forward with decisions pertaining to Iran. Even as we work quickly, we must calibrate our response with the long term in mind. The issues related to Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, its role in the Persian Gulf region, and its impact on world energy markets will not be addressed with a single act or policy, be it military, economic, or diplomatic. The American people must know that whatever policy options are chosen will likely require years, if not decades, of intense vigilance and diplomatic follow-up.

To assist us in our deliberations today, we welcome two distinguished panels of experts. The first panel will discuss the status of Iran's nuclear program. We are joined by Dr. Robert Einhorn, a Senior Adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Dr. David Albright, President of the Institute for Science and International Security. Our second panel will discuss Iran's motivations and strategies. Joining us will be Dr. Ken Pollack, the Director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution; Mr. Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert with the International Crisis Group; Dr. Patrick Clawson, Deputy Director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; and Dr. Geoffrey Kemp, Director of Regional Strategic Programs at The Nixon Center.

We thank our witnesses for being with us today, and we look forward to their insights.

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