STATEMENT OF STEPHEN G. RADEMAKER
Foreign Policy Project Adviser, Bipartisan Policy Center
Principal, The Podesta Group

"Addressing the Iranian Nuclear Challenge: Understanding the Military Options"

Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
June 20, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Congressman Smith, Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today with Senator Chuck Robb and David Albright to discuss the growing nuclear threat that we today face from Iran.

Bipartisan Policy Center Task Force on Iran

As Senator Robb indicated in his remarks, he and I have served for over four years on a task force of the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) focused on the issue of Iran. It is a very distinguished group that is truly bipartisan in its composition. We issued our first report in September of 2008, prior to that year's presidential election. As a result, we addressed our initial recommendations not to a particular U.S. Administration, but rather to both Senator Obama and Senator McCain, not knowing which of them was going to be our next President. As it turned out, Senator Obama won that election, and he proceeded to lure away two of our original task force members, Dr. Ash Carter and Ambassador Dennis Ross, both of whom have gone on to serve with great distinction in his Administration.

Our first report was entitled "Meeting the Challenge: U.S. Policy Toward Iranian Nuclear Development".[1] In it we stated that "continued Iranian enrichment of uranium and ineffectively monitored operation of the light water reactor at Bushehr threaten U.S. and global security, regional stability, and the international nonproliferation regime." Consequently, we concluded that "a nuclear weapons-capable Islamic Republic of Iran is strategically untenable," and we recommended a triple-track strategy for preventing a nuclear weapons-capable Iran. As explained by Senator Robb, those three tracks are diplomacy, sanctions, and the credible threat that force may be used if the other two tracks fail.

The BPC task force on Iran proceeded to issue three additional reports on Iran: "Meeting the Challenge: Time Is Running Out" in September 2009,[2] "Meeting the Challenge: When Time Runs Out" in June 2010,[3] and "Meeting the Challenge: Stopping the Clock" in February 2012.[4] As suggested by the titles of the reports, we believe the Iranian nuclear threat has been

[1] http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/report/meeting-challenge-us-policy-toward-iranian-nuclear-development.
[2] http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/report/meeting-challenge-time-running-out.
[3] http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/report/meeting-challenge-when-time-runs-out.
[4] http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/report/meeting-challenge-stopping-clock.

growing steadily since 2008, and we have continued to recommend a triple-track strategy to prevent a nuclear weapons-capable Iran.

The consistent view of our task force has been that, of the three tracks we recommend, the third one is the most underdeveloped. There is no doubting the openness of the Obama Administration to a diplomatic settlement with Iran. Our negotiators have been in Moscow just this week seeking a diplomatic solution. Likewise, the Obama Administration, with the strong—in fact, I would say essential—help of the U.S. Congress, has also vigorously sought to step up economic sanctions on Iran. But when it comes to credibly demonstrating that, if all else fails, force will be used if necessary to prevent Iran from achieving a nuclear weapons capability, we believe U.S. policy has fallen short. We devoted much of our most recent report, issued in February of this year, to proposing measures to enhance the credibility of the military option. We also issued a paper in March, entitled "Establishing a Credible Threat Against Iran's Nuclear Program," spelling out in greater detail some of these measures.[5]

Senator Robb in his testimony has reviewed these recommendations, and I will not belabor them in my testimony, except to reiterate that we applaud the leadership role this Committee has taken in this year's National Defense Authorization Act in seeking to mandate some of our recommendations. For the same reason, we also applaud the House of Representatives as a whole for the leadership it demonstrated in recently passing H.R. 4133, "The United States-Israel Enhanced Security Cooperation Act of 2012," which among other things, called on the United States to provide Israel with additional "air refueling tankers, missile defense capabilities, and specialized munitions" such as bunker busters.

Progress of Iran's Nuclear Program

The focus of my testimony today is on the growing nature of the Iranian threat, which forms the factual premise upon which our recommendations are based. For Iran, as for any nation seeking to develop nuclear weapons, the biggest challenge is obtaining enough fissile material—typically highly enriched uranium, or plutonium—necessary build the bombs they want. With its uranium enrichment program, Iran has the technical capability to produce highly enriched uranium, even if to date it is only known to have used that capability to produce low enriched uranium.

Of course, Iran's continued operation of its enrichment program is illegal under international law, as the U.N. Security Council has, on six occasions since 2006, adopted binding resolutions demanding that Iran suspend uranium enrichment.[6] Iran has simply ignored these legally binding directives of the Security Council.

[5] http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/staff-paper/establishing-credible-threat-against-iran%E2%80%99s-nuclear-program.

[6] Resolution 1696 (July 31, 2006), Resolution 1737 (December 23, 2006), Resolution 1747 (March 24, 2007), Resolution 1803 (March 3, 2008), Resolution 1835 (September 27, 2008), and Resolution 1929 (June 9, 2010).

By keeping track of the progress of Iran's enrichment program, we can measure Iran's progress toward the achieving the capability to produce nuclear weapons. In tracking Iran's enrichment program, we are fortunate that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) also monitors this program and issues quarterly reports on it. Over time, these reports provide a very clear picture of the inexorable progress Iran is making. As part of our task force's work, we have carefully reviewed and interpreted the IAEA's reports. The most recent IAEA report, dated May 25, 2012, is in many ways the most troubling report in many years. Key facts which emerge from this report include:

- As of May, Iran had produced 3,345 kg of 3.5% enriched uranium[7]. This is more than ten times as much enriched uranium as Iran had produced at the time of our first report in September 2008. With further enrichment, this would be enough enriched uranium for approximately two nuclear weapons.

- The rate at which 3.5% enriched uranium was being produced between February and May 2012 was the highest ever, 158 kg per month. This is 37% higher than the rate achieved in any previous period, and more than three times the rate of production before the Stuxnet worm disabled some of Iran's centrifuges.

- As of May, Iran was feeding UF6 into more centrifuges than ever before, 8,818. However, this was only ten more operating centrifuges than were counted during the previous report, meaning that the 37% increase in production was achieved almost entirely by increasing the efficiency of operations, not by deploying additional centrifuges. These facts should put to rest the debate that had been taking place among experts about whether Iran had encountered technical obstacles as a result of Stuxnet or other problems that would constrain Iran's rate of progress. Regrettably, it appears that if Iran was facing such technical obstacles, they have now been overcome.

- Iran's production rate for 20% enriched uranium increased 25% over the previous reporting period. As a result, Iran now has 98.4 kg of uranium enriched to 20%, amounting to almost two-thirds of the 155 kg of this material needed (with further enrichment) for a nuclear bomb. All of this material has been produced over the past two and a half years, since Iran began enriching to 20%.

- At the rate of production that has now been achieved, Iran will be able to produce 2000 kg of 3.5% enriched uranium annually—more than the 1,850 kg needed (with further enrichment) for a nuclear bomb.

[7] Uranium is enriched in a gaseous form known as uranium hexafluoride (UF6). The IAEA reports its data in kilograms of UF6. The BPC has measured Iran's progress in kilograms of solid uranium produced. Consistent with BPC practice, the numbers in this statement are for uranium metal. One kilogram of UF6 can be processed into approximately .67 kg of uranium metal.

- Similarly, at the rate of 20% production that has now been achieved, Iran will be able to produce 102 kg of 20% enriched uranium annually—two-thirds of the 155 kg needed (with further enrichment) for a nuclear bomb.

- The IAEA revealed that it had detected uranium particles enriched to 27% at the deeply buried Fordow enrichment facility, which it had previously declared to be limited to the production of 20% enriched uranium. Iran reportedly claimed that it had enriched to this higher level by mistake. At best, this finding underscores the ability Iran now has to enrich to substantially higher levels. At worst, it may reflect preparations by Iran to begin producing highly enriched uranium for allegedly peaceful purposes, something that a recent report by David Albright and two of his colleagues at the Institute for Science and International Security warned may be in prospect.[8]

As a result of the progress Iran has achieved, it could, if it so wished, produce a nuclear weapon very quickly. According to Gregory S. Jones, who has served as an expert consultant to the BPC's Iran Task Force, as well as to the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, Iran's demonstrated enrichment capabilities would permit it to produce a nuclear weapon from its existing stockpile of nuclear material within 35 to 106 days.[9] Last November, by contrast, the corresponding estimate was 60 to 180 days. Further, once Iran has built a stockpile 155 kg of 20% enriched uranium (the minimum needed for a nuclear weapon), which it can be expected to do by November 2012 at the current rate of enrichment to 20%, this window could close to just eight days.

Of course, there are many reasons why Iran may not rush to produce a nuclear weapon as soon as having one is within reach. But these timelines suggest how close Iran now is to having nuclear weapons if it wants them, and how much progress it is making in being able to have them in very short order.

Significance of the Threat

Our task force reports have spelled out the many reasons why a nuclear weapons-capable Iran is strategically untenable for the United States. Key reasons include:

- Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism, and cannot be trusted not provide nuclear weapons to terrorist groups that it backs, including Hezbollah and Hamas, who may in turn use such weapons against the United States or its allies.

---

[8] David Albright, Andrea Stricker, and Christina Walrond, "Déjà vu at Fordow? What are Iran's enrichment plans?," June 4, 2012, http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/deja-vu-at-fordow-what-are-irans-enrichment-plans/.

[9] Gregory S. Jones, "Iran's Rapid Enrichment Progress Moves It Ever Closer to a Nuclear Weapons Capability: Centrifuge Enrichment and the IAEA May 25, 2012 Safeguards Update," June 6, 2012, http://npolicy.org/article_file/Iran_Rapid_Enrichment_Progress.pdf.

- Israel views possession by Iran of nuclear weapons as an existential threat, and is resolved not accept nuclear weapons in Iran.

- Iran's other neighbors, particularly the Sunni Arab governments of the Persian Gulf region, worry that Iran would use nuclear weapons to intimidate them and establish hegemony over their oil-rich region.

- Even if Iran did not use nuclear weapons, its mere possession of them (or the belief that it possessed them) would embolden Iran to act even more aggressively in its use of terror and conventional military threats than is already the case.

- Traditional deterrence as it was practiced during the Cold War is unlikely to be effective against Iran, and nuclear deterrence between Israel and Iran may prove particularly unstable.

- Other countries in the region that feel threatened by a nuclear armed Iran can be expected to seek to match Iran's nuclear capabilities, giving rise to the risk that the global nuclear nonproliferation regime will unravel as a result the achievement by Iran of a nuclear weapons capability.

- The combination of all these factors means that the global supply of oil—20 percent of which passes through the Strait of Hormuz—would be at considerable risk if Iran comes to possess, or is believed to possess, nuclear weapons. While many observers have commented on the risk to oil supplies and oil prices of military action against Iran, too little attention has been paid to those same risks in the event that Iran succeeds in producing nuclear weapons.

For all these reasons, our task force stands by its conclusion that achievement by Iran of a nuclear weapons capability would be strategically untenable. Accordingly, we urge both Congress and the Administration to uphold President Obama's commitment to "use all elements of American power" to prevent Iran from achieving such a capability.