

**“Iranian Political and Nuclear Realities, and U.S. Policy Options”
Hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, March 3, 2009
Opening Statement**

We’re all pleased to welcome this outstanding panel of witnesses for today’s hearing. They have a tall order. We’ve asked them to help us understand the way forward in dealing with one of the most urgent challenges facing the world. But I can’t imagine a better group to kick off the first of three days of public and classified hearings on Iran’s nuclear program and the policy options facing us.

I want to welcome back a couple of familiar faces. Ambassador Frank Wisner has been here many times in many capacities. Frank, we appreciate your willingness to share the insights you have gained from your long and distinguished career of public service. I’m also pleased to see Richard Haass across the table once again. Few people are better qualified to provide us with a strong perspective on where Iran fits into the world’s geopolitical map.

Karim Sadjadpour is now an associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. But his intimate knowledge of Iran’s senior officials, clerics and dissidents offers the committee a genuine insider’s perspective. Frankly, we have operated too often without understanding the realities on the other side of this critical issue. Mark Fitzpatrick brings us long experience in the field of nonproliferation and an analyst’s keen eye on just how far down the road Iran has gotten since its secret nuclear program was exposed six and a half years ago.

I don’t have to tell you that we are living through difficult and uncertain times. We are rightly focused heavily on the state of our economy. But, as a nation and as legislators, we cannot afford to ignore the challenges outside our borders.

Right near the top of that list of challenges is Iran and its troubling nuclear program. The impact of Iran’s steady nuclear progress is real. When I was in the Middle East recently, I encountered deep worries in every Arab capital about Iran’s ascendancy and the possibility that it will build an atomic weapon. And of course in Israel, the anxiety is high.

What we know about Iran’s nuclear and missile progress raises grave concerns for us and our allies.

Iran has built a uranium enrichment plant approximately 75 feet underground at Natanz where nearly 4,000 centrifuges are spinning away enriching uranium, with hundreds more centrifuges apparently ready to start up soon.

Just two weeks ago, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that the plant has enriched enough reactor-grade uranium to theoretically allow Iran to make an atomic bomb. On Sunday, Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, confirmed the IAEA report, saying publicly that the U.S. believes Iran has amassed enough uranium to build an atomic bomb – if its leaders were to take the reckless step of further enriching that stockpile to weapons grade.

We have to stop them from taking that very dangerous next step.

At the same time, Iran continues to defy the United Nations Security Council by constructing a reactor at Arak that, if it were completed, looks to be very well suited for producing weapons-grade plutonium. The IAEA reports that Iran has recently impeded its access to this facility.

And Iran continues to test ballistic missiles and to launch so-called space launch vehicles that Iran can learn from to expand its ballistic missile capability.

But what we do *not* know about Iran's program is even more alarming.

For six years, the IAEA has been asking Iran to answer questions about the possible military dimensions of its nuclear program. The questions have grown more substantive and pointed as time has passed. And Iran has grown more defiant, ignoring sanctions by the UN Security Council and obstructing the IAEA.

Because of its history of concealment and deception, we cannot afford to take Iran at its word that its nuclear ambitions are solely civilian. Its leaders must answer the IAEA's questions fully and quickly.

These gaps in what we know about Iran's nuclear program are big and they are dangerous. I hope our witnesses will help fill in some of them.

For me, some of the most troubling unanswered questions were raised in documents that were reportedly found on a laptop computer obtained by the CIA in 2004. Among the thousands of pages of data from that computer are, according to press reports, documents that appear to show blueprints for a nuclear warhead and designs for missiles to carry it.

One of those designs apparently tracked the flight of the missile and showed the detonation of its explosives 600 meters above the ground. Now folks, that's a lousy height for a conventional weapon. But it's a devastating altitude for a nuclear weapon intended to wipe out a city.

Iran has refused to answer the toughest of these questions. Just last week, a UN official acknowledged to my staff that talks between the IAEA and Tehran have reached an impasse. The official said he didn't know what comes next.

Well, we do know what comes next. The Obama administration has said that it wants to open direct talks with Iran. This is the right first step and I applaud the president for taking it.

But we must be honest with ourselves. Just talking will not solve this problem, even direct talks between Washington and Tehran. While Iran was just talking to the IAEA and the Europeans, it deftly sidestepped every red line laid down by the international community. While Iran was just talking to the world, it moved to the threshold of becoming a nuclear state.

I point this out not to lay blame. I point this out because we cannot move forward to a solution without understanding how we got to this dangerous juncture in history. The time for incremental steps and unanswered questions is over.

Talking with Iran is the right starting point. I have supported this idea for many years and I'm glad that its day is coming.

But the fact is that the United States must open these talks from a position of strength. The President's recent announcement of a responsible redeployment plan for Iraq is a step in the right direction. But we need the full backing of our allies in Europe as well as Russia, China and other countries as we sit down across the table from the Iranians. This is not just an American problem, and it will not be just an American solution. Our friends and allies need to understand this.

And Iran needs to understand that these will not be drawn out negotiations. That's a scenario that would give Tehran a green light for more progress on enrichment and other nuclear projects, some still being carried out in the dark.

We need to set a timetable for substantive progress. And we need to make sure that Iran's leaders understand that the full weight of the international community will come down on them if this issue is not resolved. And by full weight I mean tougher economic sanctions, further restrictions on trade and finance, which will apply meaningful pressure on the Iranian regime at a time when oil prices have plummeted and its economy is hurting.

The solution to this problem lies within our reach. With our friends and allies, we need to act boldly and wisely to engage Iran backed by real consequences for its continued non-compliance.

I'm looking forward to the guidance that we are going to receive from our distinguished panel this morning and from General Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski on Thursday morning.

With that, let me now turn to Senator Lugar.

After that, I'll ask Mark Fitzpatrick to start with his testimony, followed by Karim Sadjadpour, then Ambassador Wisner, and finally Richard Haass.