

U.S. Policy on Iran

Remarks by Chairman Robert Menendez

Senate Foreign Relations Committee – October 3, 2013

We are here today, under unusual circumstances, but nevertheless ready to fulfill our Constitutional duty to oversee national security policy, foreign policy, international economic policy as it relates to safeguarding America's interests abroad.

That is our fundamental duty and we have convened today to ensure that the world understands that a shutdown of government in the United States is not a shutdown of American interests and obligations abroad.

Having said that, we are pleased to have with us a familiar face to the Committee – and a good friend: Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman. She is here to help shed light on U.S. policy toward Iran given the change in leadership and recent statements of President Rouhani, and to provide her perspective on the way ahead on the nuclear issue.

On our second panel today we have three distinguished experts from the private sector: Dr. David Albright, a physicist who is founder and President of the Institute for Science and International Security and who has written extensively on secret nuclear weapons programs around the world; Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Washington Institute where he has focused on Iran's efforts to expand its influence in the region; and Dr. Ray Takeyh, Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a former Senior Advisor on Iran at the State Department. We look forward to your testimony and thoughts on the status and future of U.S.-Iran policy.

But, before we hear from our panelists, let me restate concerns I have expressed publicly and will express again for the record.

In my view – the sanctions have worked to bring us to this pivotal point and the fundamental question now is whether the Iranians are ready to actual conclude an agreement with the international community and whether they are prepared to turn rhetoric into action.

In the lead up to last week's UN General Assembly meeting I was cautiously hopeful about what we would hear, but in my view, the new face of Iran looked and sounded very much like the old face, with a softer tone and smoother edge.

Although Iran's messenger may have changed in the last election - the message seems to have remained the same.

The questions are these: Should we be cautiously hopeful for a diplomatic solution given the new leadership and rhetoric coming from Tehran? What are the Administration's near-term

diplomatic goals and objectives for P5+1 negotiations? How can we test Iranian intentions that they are negotiating in good faith? How do we get Iran to commit to transparency and to allow full verification that it has abandoned its pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability?

Until we have the answers to these questions, it is my view that we must sustain the pressure on Iran and maintain the credible military threat that has brought Iran to the table.

It is clear that while we are talking that Iran's centrifuges are still spinning. Iran in the last two years has installed many thousands of additional centrifuges, and though it isn't enriching in all of them, the vast majority are fully installed and under vacuum, meaning Iran could quickly double its enrichment capacity.

The fact is these expanded capabilities are reducing the time Iran needs to quickly produce a sufficient amount of weapons-grade uranium.

The fear is Iran will achieve a "break-out" capability - defined as the technical capability to produce sufficient weapon-grade uranium for a nuclear device without being detected by the international community.

According to the work of our panelist, David Albright, President of the Institute for Science and International Security - if Iran continues to expand its centrifuges at its current pace, it will be able to produce by mid-2014 enough material for one bomb within a period of several weeks. It is an open question as to whether the international community would be able to detect a break-out if it could occur this quickly.

Iran is also nearing completion of a heavy water reactor at Arak. If that reactor operates, Iran could create a plutonium pathway to nuclear weapons -- enough plutonium each year for one or two nuclear weapons.

From my perspective as long as Iran is actively pursuing its nuclear program we must actively work to increase the pressure. This is no less than what is required by multiple UN Security Council resolutions.

While we welcome Iran's diplomatic overtures -- they cannot be used to buy time, avoid sanctions, and continue the march toward a nuclear weapons capability.

I welcome President Rouhani's announcement at UN General Assembly, and the Supreme Leader's fatwa that Iran seeks a peaceful resolution to international concerns about Iran's nuclear program and is committed to a peaceful nuclear program, but compliance with the U.N. Security Council resolutions will be the ultimate test of Iran's intentions.

Let me conclude by restating my belief that the sanctions regime in place thus far has been critical in compelling the Iranian government back to the negotiating table. If the sanctions were

not hurting, we would not have heard so much about them in President Rouhani's speech. What is important now is what Iran does, not what it says.

We do not need more words. What we would like to see is compliance with the four UN Security Council Resolutions, and suspension of uranium enrichment.

Some of us are moving forward with a new round of sanctions that will require further reduction in purchases of Iranian petroleum, but we are also serious about relief from sanctions if the Iranian Government meets its Security Council responsibilities.

With that let me turn to Senator Corker for his opening remarks.