

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on Iran
May 18, 2006

The Foreign Relations Committee meets today to continue our examination of U.S. policy toward Iran. This is the second hearing of our two-part series. Yesterday, we focused our attention on the status of Iran's nuclear program and on analysis of Iran's motivations and strategies. Today, we will evaluate the options available to deal with this challenge.

The Bush Administration has been attempting to build a cohesive international coalition capable of applying economic and diplomatic pressure on Iran that would have the potential to dissuade it from continuing its drive toward a nuclear weapons capability. Though efforts to attain a Security Council consensus on a firm response to Iran's actions have not been successful – primarily because of resistance from Russia and China – diplomacy backed by multi-lateral sanctions remains the focus of U.S. policy.

Our witnesses yesterday judged that Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons is not inevitable, though they underscored that a nuclear weapons capability is an extremely important Iranian goal that would be given up only grudgingly. They noted that the Iranian leadership is pursuing nuclear weapons for a number of reasons, including self-defense, Iranian national pride, and regional influence. But as several of our witnesses asserted, the Iranian leadership is faced with economic problems that could be exacerbated by multi-lateral sanctions and international isolation. In contrast, a verifiable resolution of the nuclear problem could result in long-term economic benefits flowing to Iran, including much-needed Western investment in the energy sector. Our witnesses also emphasized that Iran's government is far from a monolith. Factions and personalities in Tehran have varying priorities that could lead to diplomatic opportunities.

The witnesses generally shared the view that no diplomatic options, including direct talks, should be taken off the table. Direct talks may in some circumstances be useful in demonstrating to our allies our commitment to diplomacy, dispelling anti-American rumors among the Iranian people, preventing Iranian misinterpretation of our goals, or reducing the risk of accidental escalation. Our policies and our communications must be clear, precise, and confident, without becoming inflexible.

I noted a comment by Dr. Henry Kissinger in an op-ed on Iran that appeared in Tuesday's *Washington Post*. Dr. Kissinger wrote: "The diplomacy appropriate to denuclearization is comparable to the containment policy that helped win the Cold War: i.e., no preemptive challenge to the external security of the adversary, but firm resistance to attempts to project its power abroad and reliance on domestic forces to bring about internal change. It was precisely such a nuanced policy that caused President Ronald Reagan to invite Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to a dialogue within weeks of labeling the Soviet Union the 'evil empire.'"

Dr. Kissinger's analogy, as well as the testimony that we heard yesterday, reinforce the point that Iran poses a sophisticated policy challenge that will require the nuanced use of a range of diplomatic and economic tools.

To discuss how such tools might be applied, we are joined by four distinguished experts. We welcome Mr. Frank Wisner, former Ambassador to India and currently Vice Chairman for External Affairs at the American International Group; Dr. Vali Nasr, a Professor of National Security Affairs at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in Monterrey, California; Ms. Julia Nanay, a Senior Director at PFC Energy in Washington; and Mr. James Phillips, a Research Fellow in Middle Eastern Affairs at the Heritage Foundation.

We thank our witnesses for joining us today, and we look forward to their insights on the policy options open to the United States.

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