

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
June 22, 2010

Chairman Kerry on Iran: “Now our challenge is to turn pressure into progress”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – This morning, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) chaired a hearing titled “Iran Policy in the Aftermath of United Nations Sanctions.”

The full text of his statement as prepared is below:

Thank you all for coming to discuss the next steps in America’s policy toward Iran. Today, we are privileged to welcome two of its principal architects: Ambassador William Burns, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs; and Mr. Stuart Levey, Undersecretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence.

This hearing comes at a crucial moment in our efforts to curtail Iran’s nuclear ambitions. We all understand the stakes: A nuclear armed Iran would pose an intolerable threat to our ally Israel, risk igniting an arms race in what is already the world’s most dangerous region, and undermine our global effort to halt the spread of nuclear weapons.

That’s why, two weeks ago, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1929, widening the scope and scale of international sanctions against Iran. It expands sanctions against the Revolutionary Guard Corps, subjects Iranian vessels to inspection on the high seas, bans most categories of arms sales to Iran, and restricts the kinds of investments that are allowed in Iran.

Resolution 1929 also contains a number of non-mandatory measures which give the Treasury and State Departments important new leverage to persuade financial institutions, oil companies and other countries to divest from Iran. I congratulate all those involved in this impressive diplomatic effort, including our two witnesses today.

As we gather this morning, Congress is also finalizing legislation that contains a number of tough new economic penalties aimed at persuading Iran to change its behavior. Among other measures, it targets firms that sell refined petroleum to Iran or deal with the Revolutionary Guard.

These steps to increase pressure are necessary because Iran continues to defy the international community, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the UN Security Council. Iran’s publicly disclosed stocks at its Natanz enrichment facility now include more than 2,400 kilograms of reactor-grade low enriched uranium. That is enough feedstock for two nuclear weapons, though it’s important to note that Iran would first have to expel inspectors, enrich that material to the much higher level required for weapons purposes, and cross separate weaponization hurdles. It is especially troubling that Iran has recently begun enriching small quantities of uranium to a concentration of around 20%, crossing yet another nuclear threshold. If Iran continues much further down this path – and there is reason to believe that it intends to—then a later move to produce bomb-grade uranium would be significantly easier and faster.

Given Iran’s dangerous progress, some will argue that engagement has been wasted. We all wish Tehran’s response had been different. But our ability to secure a new resolution at the United Nations and persuade allies to go still further in pressuring Iran is evidence that engagement has paid off.

Still, the true test of our policy will not be pressure applied, but behavior changed. Recent experience suggests that neither sanctions nor engagement alone will convince Iran to abandon its nuclear program. Only by combining both pressure and diplomacy into a comprehensive and coordinated strategy will we have a chance at altering Iran’s behavior.

Of course, there is no guarantee that Iran won’t continue to reject our diplomatic overtures. That will present an opportunity to turn the pressure even higher. But given the stakes involved, if there is an opening, we must be willing to explore it.

That brings us to the questions at the heart of today's hearing. Given the failure of the previous three UN Security Council resolutions to deter Iran, how will this one be different? How much time do we have and how long will it take for these sanctions to have an impact? And what are the real red lines for the Iranian nuclear program and what consequences are we willing to impose if Iran crosses them?

We need to articulate an end-state that is rigorous enough from a non-proliferation standpoint, but also has some prospect of being acceptable to both parties. America and our allies have put proposals on the table. The June 2008 proposal by the P5+1 to Iran, endorsed by both the Bush and Obama administrations, was reiterated this month as an annex to resolution 1929. Last October's proposal to take 1200 kilograms out of Iran for further enrichment for the Tehran Research Reactor held promise. But Iran failed to provide a concrete response until the eleventh hour, on the eve of new UN sanctions, while continuing to enrich uranium to 20%. I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses on the status of each of these initiatives.

We must also understand how our efforts play into Iran's volatile domestic politics. We should take care that efforts to deter Iran's nuclear program don't come at the expense of the Iranian people, who may yet emerge as a force for moderation within Iran. We recently passed the one-year anniversary of Iran's flawed presidential elections. In the unrest that followed, Iranian security forces were responsible for widespread violence and abuse against their own people. Dozens of democracy activists were killed and thousands more thrown in jail without due process. Three American citizens – Josh Fattal, Sarah Shourd, and Shane Bauer – remain in prison eleven months after being jailed for straying onto Iranian soil. We will continue to speak up for the rights and wellbeing of the Iranian people, and of those Americans held in Iranian custody.

In the interest of time, I won't recite our witnesses' long and impressive resumes other than to note that these are two of the best public servants we have. Ambassador Burns' sustained diplomacy over the course of many months, working closely with Ambassador Susan Rice in New York, was instrumental in securing the passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929. Mr. Levey's efforts to dissuade international banks and businesses from doing business with Iran have already shown impressive results.

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