



# U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

---

**For Release:**  
**March 29, 2007**

**Contact: Elizabeth Alexander**  
**(202) 224-5042**

**\*\*Remarks as Prepared for Delivery\*\***

**United States Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.**

**Opening Statement in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

**Hearing on Iran – An Update**

**Witness: The Honorable R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs**  
**March 29, 2007**

---

***BIDEN: “If there is anything worse than a poorly-planned intentional war, it is an unplanned, unintentional war.”***

Secretary Burns, welcome. Your testimony comes at an important moment. Tensions with Iran are rising. Its government refuses to release 15 British service members it illegally detained last week. In Iraq, its Quds Force is accused of supplying deadly weapons to militias who have attacked our troops; we’ve arrested some of its members.

The President has dispatched two aircraft carriers to the Persian Gulf. They are currently in the midst of extensive military exercises. President Ahmadinejad’s incendiary threats to wipe Israel off the map, and his denial of the Holocaust, combined with Iran’s nuclear program, have led to legitimate concern over his intentions.

Iran’s perceived expansionism, including its support for Hezbollah and Hamas, has sparked deep fear across the Arab world. Iran and the Sunni Arab states are on opposite sides of a growing Sunni-Shi’a rift that extends from Lebanon, through Iraq, the Gulf States, and into South Asia. All of this contributes to a regional tinderbox that could ignite with one wrong move.

An otherwise minor incident could quickly spiral into military confrontation. If there is anything worse than a poorly-planned intentional war, it is an unplanned, unintentional war. We need cool heads to prevail. We need patient, hard headed diplomacy.

That is what you have pursued at the UN Security Council. Last May, the Administration reversed course and joined forces with our European allies.

Since then, you have secured two unanimous UN Security Council resolutions sanctioning Iran for its defiance on its nuclear program.

The sanctions are modest, but their effect has been disproportionate. They have highlighted Iran's international isolation and they have helped reveal cracks in Iran.

Ahmadinejad is no longer riding so high. He's increasingly constrained as other power centers in Iran criticize him for his diplomatic and economic failures. There are more open challenges to the regime. In recent weeks, Iranian women bravely took to the streets to challenge the government's discriminatory policies.

I support what you are doing and applaud what you've accomplished. But Mr. Secretary, after all that has happened in Iraq, and with everything that is happening here at home, this Administration has much less credibility and good will than when it started.

Many people are skeptical that the Administration has made a fundamental break with its past policy, that it is really focused on results, not ideology. So I hope that you can answer authoritatively two questions about the Administration's strategy going forward:

First, is the Administration's goal in Iran regime change or behavior change?

No one likes this regime, but let's keep our eye on the first prize: preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. How can we tell Iran not to go nuclear, but then in the next breath tell the regime our goal is to take it down?

Second, is the pressure we are applying aimed at improving our position and weakening Iran's in any future negotiations or is it designed to prepare the battlefield for war? These are the central questions I hope you will address directly in your testimony.

I believe we must continue to intensify pressure on Iran over its nuclear program with coordinated international sanctions that isolate Tehran, not the United States.

We should complement this pressure by presenting a detailed, positive vision for U.S.-Iran relations if Iran does the right thing. And we should engage Iran directly to exploit fissures within the government and between the government and the people.

But engagement is not an end in itself. It has to serve a larger purpose.

In my judgment, that purpose is to make clear the conditions under which the US and Iran can have a more normal relationship and Iran can be integrated into the regional and international systems. We also must find more effective ways of getting our message to the Iranian people.

Some in Iran may prefer confrontation to cooperation. But it is important Iranians understand that our hand is extended. We are not the ones standing in the way of peaceful co-existence and even fruitful cooperation.

The government in Tehran has a fundamental choice to make. As Iran's New Year begins, we all hope that it makes the right choice.

###