

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on
Iran: Weapons Proliferation, Terrorism and Democracy
May 19, 2005

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee meets today to examine issues related to Iran, particularly that country's pursuit of nuclear weapons. For more than eighteen years, Iran hid its nuclear activities from the world, despite being a State party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. To avoid punitive measures after the direction of its nuclear program was exposed, Iran reached agreement with the United Kingdom, Germany, and France (the EU-3) to suspend its nuclear fuel cycle capabilities. It also signed the Additional Protocol, which provided for enhanced UN inspections of its nuclear facilities.

Unfortunately, Iran has failed to ratify the Additional Protocol; it has refused to give the IAEA complete access to verify that no weapons activities are occurring; and last week, it threatened to restart its uranium conversion program. European officials responded by warning Tehran that they would leave the two-year long negotiations should any effort be made to resume uranium conversion. Since then, Iran has agreed to meet with the foreign ministers of the EU-3 next week in Europe. The United States has endorsed these negotiations and has supported the European offer that Iran be allowed to join the World Trade Organization as an added incentive for full cooperation on the nuclear issue. If these talks do not succeed, the next step may be referral of the problem to the UN Security Council.

Time is running out, not just for preventing Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons, but also for the viability of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We must recognize that Iran is at a stage in its nuclear development where it can move rapidly toward production of nuclear weapons if it ceases to be hindered by any constraints. Enforcing the NPT has always been complicated by the relatively short time period required to move from legitimate civilian nuclear power activities permitted under the treaty to building nuclear weapons. The success of the NPT depends on the international community taking decisive action when evidence emerges that a non-nuclear weapons state is illegally pursuing nuclear weapons. As in the Iranian case, warning signs that a country is cheating may come only a year or less before it is capable of building nuclear weapons absent any constraints. The efforts of the EU-3 have slowed Iran's progress, but the international community still has not coalesced behind a clear course of action with the potential to stop the Iranian nuclear program.

The U.S. already has sanctions in place on Iran for its decades-long sponsorship of terror. The international community must be willing to join the United States in imposing potent economic sanctions if Iran does not comply with its obligations. Economic benefits could also be offered to reward Iran for good behavior. Essentially, the United States and its allies must present the Iranian government with an unambiguous choice between economic self interest and pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Even if the EU-3 succeeds in the short run, we will need to apply almost constant diplomatic and economic pressure to ensure that Iran does not continue its nuclear program. Iran will be an enormous challenge for U.S. foreign policy, which can only be met through the sustained focus and attention of our highest officials. This diplomatic heavy lifting includes convincing European nations – and even Russia and China -- that their interests in Iranian trade and energy supplies are secondary to the extreme risks associated with a nuclear armed Iran.

The possibility of a nuclear-weapons capable Iran is particularly grave because of the Iranian regime's connections to terrorists. I recently surveyed 85 top international experts in the field of non-

proliferation for a forthcoming report. One of the questions that I asked the survey group was whether a nuclear attack during the next ten years was more likely to be carried out by a terrorist group or by a government. Seventy-nine percent of the experts surveyed believed a nuclear attack by terrorists was more likely. Consequently, as we look at nations that are seeking nuclear weapons, their connections to terrorists become an extremely important factor in determining our course.

For the ninth year in a row, the State Department's "Country Reports on Terrorism" has described Iran as the "most active state sponsor of terrorism" in the world. Iran's continued arming of Hizbollah is in defiance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, which calls for the withdrawal of foreign forces and disarmament of militias in Lebanon. Iran's support for HAMAS and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, also on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations, is complicating the fragile advances toward peace by the Israelis and Palestinians.

For the past decade, U.S. policy has attempted to balance between containment of Iranian threats and selective engagement to take advantage of opportunities created by reformist elements. We must be decisive in isolating and pressuring Iran to stop its pursuit of nuclear weapons, but we should also reach out to the Iranian people with hope that more pragmatic, rational voices in Iran will prevail.

Iran is holding Presidential elections in June of this year. If manipulated by the Mullahs as in the past, they are unlikely to result in a representative government. But Iranian citizens -- just like the Lebanese, Palestinians, Iraqis, Afghans and others -- have a strong desire to choose their own government. The U.S. supports the Iranian citizens who are desperate for their voices to be heard, yet fearful of the Iranian regime's use of oppressive means to prevent dissent.

The U.S. needs to take care when promoting democracy and human rights in Iran, given the regime's ability to taint any individual or group that appears connected to America. But we need to continue to emphasize that freedom and human rights, including the right to a representative government, are universal values that apply to Iran.

Momentum for change is building in the Middle East. Elections in Iraq, the Palestinian Authority elections of President Abbas, and upcoming elections in Lebanon and Egypt present new opportunities. These movements toward reform and democracy can bring even greater pressure on countries like Iran to be more responsive to their people. Our work in Iraq and our efforts to support Israeli disengagement from Gaza and the West Bank, while moving forward on the Road Map may be the most important contributions we can make to democracy in Iran and in the region.

Today, we have two outstanding panels that will provide their perspectives on Iran. First, we will hear from Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns. Secretary Burns is a good friend of this Committee, and we always look forward to our discussions with him. We also welcome a second panel of distinguished experts. Dr. Geoffrey Kemp is Director of Regional Strategic Programs at the Nixon Center; Dr. Gary Milhollin is Director of the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control; Mr. George Perkovich, is Vice President for Studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; and Dr. William Samii is the Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty Regional Analysis Coordinator for Southwest Asia and the Middle East.

We thank our witnesses and look forward to their insights.

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