

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on Iran
July 9, 2008

I join in welcoming Secretary Burns back to the Committee. We appreciate his efforts to work closely with our Committee and with Congress, and we look forward to his testimony on the critical topic of American policy toward Iran.

Iran's leaders have thus far rebuffed the international community's offer to negotiate an acceptable arrangement for their nuclear program. As a result – thanks in part to U.S. leadership - the UN Security Council has voted three times to impose sanctions on Iran, and may do so again.

Clearly, we do not want to undercut multilateral diplomatic efforts undertaken by European allies and the United Nations Security Council. Sanctions on Iran that have come out of this process have been hard won. This multilateral approach to the problem, I believe, has directly bolstered U.S. efforts to encourage foreign governments and banks to curtail commercial benefits to Iran, thereby enhancing the impact of UN sanctions.

The task for American diplomats continues to be solidifying an international consensus in favor of a plan that presents the Iranian regime with a stark choice between the benefits of accepting a verifiable cessation of their nuclear program and the detriments of proceeding along their current course.

The questions for U.S. policy include what can be done to accelerate the United Nations process? What else can we do to strengthen global cohesion and determination to ensure that Iran does not develop a nuclear weapons capability? And are we maximizing our economic and regional leverage, while maintaining diplomatic channels that will minimize possibilities for miscalculation, improve our ability to interpret what is going on in Iran, and strengthen our efforts to enlist the support of key nations?

Several weeks ago newspapers reported that Secretary Rice had mentioned during a flight the possibility of establishing a U.S. visa office or some similarly modest diplomatic presence in Iran. Reportedly the idea was motivated by an interest in facilitating more exchange and outreach with the Iranian people. State Department spokesmen downplayed the report saying nothing was contemplated in the near term. I would be interested if Secretary Burns has any thoughts on this idea in a forward-looking context.

Similarly, do we believe that the current negotiation format led by Germany, France, and the United Kingdom still gives us the best chance for success? Though we are coordinating closely with this group, should U.S. diplomats be engaging more directly in this multi-lateral effort?

Finally, without losing focus on the immediate non-proliferation issue, we cannot fail to take into account the more complex, long-term situation presented by Iran. Neither a successful diplomatic agreement on the nuclear issue, nor the use of military force against Iran's nuclear facilities would change the underlying reality that we will continue to have to contend with Iran on a wide variety of issues far into the future. Iran's young and educated population, its natural resource wealth, and its strategic location make it a relevant player in the Middle East that we cannot ignore.

Some thought has to be given to establishing a more stable long-term relationship between Iran and the United States. Such a relationship is difficult to conceive at this stage in history. Iranian policies in Iraq, Lebanon, and in the Israeli-Palestinian arena threaten our immediate interests in the Middle East. Iran's provocative foreign policy and the bombastic rhetoric of its president have fed concerns among its neighbors that it seeks to dominate the region. But history demonstrates repeatedly that conditions change and transformations are possible. We need to make sure that we are incorporating an over-the-horizon view into our policy judgments.

Secretary Burns, it is a pleasure to have you with us today. I look forward to your insights on these matters.

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