

Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Chairman Richard Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on
IRAN – SECURITY THREATS AND U.S. POLICY
October 28, 2003

Today, the Committee is pleased to welcome Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to review U.S. policy towards Iran. Secretary Armitage is a good friend of this Committee, and we always look forward to our discussions with him.

Despite some signs of reform in recent years, Iran continues to pose a serious regional and global security threat through its active support for terrorism and its continued efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction in direct violation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Today's hearing is especially timely given the agreement reached last week by the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Iran. This agreement narrowly complies with the October 31st deadline set by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for Iran to fully disclose the nature of its nuclear program. By agreeing to accept enhanced United Nations inspections of its nuclear facilities and to temporarily suspend its enrichment of uranium that could be used to make nuclear weapons, Iran hopes to avoid international sanctions.

The Europeans consider this a significant step towards ensuring that Iran's nuclear program is benign. Although Americans are hopeful that this agreement does represent progress, we should not lose sight of the fact that Iran was caught red-handed trying to build nuclear weapons through several methods over a sustained period in violation of its treaty obligations. After years of Iranian delay, deception, and denial, this agreement should not lead us to a false sense of security about the Iranian proliferation threat.

In fact, the head of Iran's National Security Council reportedly told Reuters that the decision to suspend uranium enrichment was temporary and would last only as long as the Iranian government believes that it benefits their purposes.

It is far from clear that the additional inspections to which Iran has agreed will prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear capability, because they rely on Teheran telling the truth. The international community must be prepared to take more effective action.

When confronted with a case as blatant as Iran, the United States and like-minded allies must use the Security Council to demand that the violator cease all illegal weapons

activities, dismantle weapons-related facilities, and submit to “super inspections,” even tougher than those imposed on Iraq. Elements should include unfettered freedom for inspectors, unsupervised interviews of nuclear scientists and engineers (out of the country with their families, if necessary), and unrestrained aerial surveillance. Iran may object that such intrusive inspections impinge on its sovereignty, but this is the price Teheran should be paying to convince outsiders that, for once, it is keeping its word under the NPT. By demanding that Iran prove that it is living up to the NPT, the Security Council would strengthen the treaty.

Some will object that such strong action may force Iran’s ruling mullahs to walk out of the NPT. But keeping Iran in the NPT should not be an end in itself. The NPT is only useful to the extent that its provisions are enforced to prevent states from acquiring nuclear weapons. If the international community were persuaded to work together, it would have substantial leverage over Iran. An Iranian withdrawal from the NPT would halt the Russian reactor deal and cooperation with other nuclear suppliers, expose Iran’s naked nuclear ambitions for all to see, and stiffen international resolve for tough economic sanctions.

In the short run, our allies will be inclined to give Teheran the benefit of the doubt, partly to avoid a confrontation and partly to preserve commercial opportunities in Iran. But the United States should begin laying the groundwork now for a decisive international response to any additional violations.

Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons is not the only threat that it poses to international security. Iran is a major state sponsor of terrorism. It continues to support Hezbollah in Lebanon and to fund Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, who employ violence and suicide bombers to frustrate the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Iran remained neutral as the U.S. and Coalition forces removed Saddam Hussein from power. But Iran maintains close ties to several Iraqi Shiite Islamic factions and appears to be instigating these groups to undermine Coalition efforts to rebuild Iraq. In addition, Iran claims to have Al Qaeda terrorists in custody. It is unclear, however, if Iran is sheltering these terrorists, holding them as leverage to use in dealings with the U.S., or pursuing another agenda.

The United States is also concerned by the political, religious, and gender repression perpetrated by the ruling clerics on their own people. These struggles were highlighted when Shirin Ebadi, a courageous Iranian woman who has brought world attention to Iran’s human rights violations, received the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize.

President Bush has pursued a policy of containing Iran, while employing selective engagement, as has almost every American administration for the last two decades. Within this context of containment, the challenges before U.S. policymakers are how we can change Iranian behavior in key areas, how U.S. policy can take advantage of opportunities created by reformist elements within Iranian society, and how we can generate more support from our allies on issues pertaining to Iran. Our response to these challenges will help shape the future of the Middle East and will have a significant impact on the outcome of the global war on terrorism.

Mr. Secretary, we thank you for your participation in this important hearing, and we are anxious to hear your assessments.

The Committee also is pleased to be joined by a second panel of distinguished experts. With us today are Ambassador William Luers, President of the UN Association; Dr. Nasser Hadian of Tehran University, who is a visiting professor at Columbia University; Dr. Anthony Cordesman, the Arleigh A. Burke Chair for Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies; and Ambassador Robert Einhorn, Senior Adviser for the International Security Program also at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

We welcome all of our witnesses.