



Opening Statement of Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (D-DE)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing on
“A Nuclear Iran: Challenges and Responses”
March 2, 2006

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for scheduling this timely hearing and also for arranging the intelligence briefing that we received earlier this morning.

The world’s effort to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons is entering a very delicate stage.

- Iran may accept the Russian proposal to turn Iran’s uranium hexafluoride into nuclear reactor fuel, and agree not to engage in uranium enrichment or spent fuel reprocessing.
- If it does not do that, however, then the U.N. Security Council is likely to take up the issue and begin an effort to pressure Iran into meeting the demands of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

I support that effort and I believe we all have a vital interest in its success. Today’s hearing may help us understand what that will take.

The outrageous and confrontational statements by Iran’s President, calling for the destruction of Israel and denying the Holocaust, have helped to focus minds on the prospect of a nuclear Iran. The EU-Three have grown frustrated by Iran’s antics and are moving to ratchet up pressure on Iran. And Russia and China voted to report Iran to the U.N. Security Council.

But pressuring Iran will not be easy. Tom Schelling warned us years ago that if you want to compel a country to do something, you must do more than threatening or applying pressure. You must also convince the country that if it complies, you will stop the pressure (rather than “moving the goal posts” and demanding still more).

Maintaining pressure won’t be easy, either, because we need other countries to stand with us; we can’t do this alone.

And we need to understand Iran:

- Why does Iran want nuclear weapons, or at least the capability to build them? What would it do with them?
- Are there significant differences of opinion among elite groups? Between the leaders and the led?
- What sanctions might work, if we define success as either convincing Iran to change its policy or making it much harder for Iran to complete its nuclear programs?
- Would sanctions divide Iran, or unite it in support of the current regime?
- Are there ways to reach out to Iran, without sacrificing long-standing American interests in human rights, Middle East peace, and counter-terrorism?
- Are there ways to promote a dialogue within Iran on whether nuclear weapons will contribute to Iran's national security or harm it?
- Are there ways to support the Iranian people, without undermining the democratic forces that we want to help?

There are no easy answers to these questions, but we have three fine witnesses today to help us grapple with these questions. I look forward to their testimony, Mr. Chairman.