

Opening Statement, Chairman Tom Coburn, M.D.

Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, and International Security

Iran: Teheran's Nuclear Recklessness and the U.S. Response – The Experts' Perspective

November 15, 2005

Thank you for joining us today. This hearing will focus on Iran and examine the relationship between Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and its status as a state-sponsor of terrorism. Some have argued that we should de-link Iran's global support for terror from its pursuit of nuclear weapons. They suggest that the two problems are different and need to be addressed separately.

I couldn't disagree more. The facts that Iran is trying to build nuclear weapons AND that it is a terrorist regime are not two different problems – they are the same problem. Possession of nuclear capabilities by responsible governments who use such weapons defensively and as a deterrent, and who have a track record of respecting life and liberty is one thing. But that's not what we're dealing with here. A nuclear weapon in the hands of the regime in Tehran could mean that no one on Earth is safe from nuclear attack. Iran has a history of supporting terror against its own citizens and against U.S. – and is why the State Department lists it as a state sponsor of terrorism. Permitting a more destructive weapon in the hands of those motivated to murder is worse than reckless, it is immoral. I am convinced that history will judge those who spent more time talking and less time acting to prevent such a disaster.

Action is demanded when we move from talking about nuclear proliferation to talking about just who it is that's proliferating.

Iran's Threat Against Israel

What are Iran's intentions? If they weren't clear before, they certainly are now. Just last month, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad proclaimed to the world his government's desire to "wipe Israel off the face of the map." This statement sent chills around the globe. British Prime Minister Tony Blair stated: "I felt a real sense of revulsion at these remarks. Anyone in Europe, knowing our history, when we hear such statements made about Israel, it makes us feel very angry. It's just completely wrong." (The Guardian, October 28, 2005).

White House Spokesman Scott McClellan correctly stated: "[Iran's pronounced intention] underscores the concerns we have about Iran's nuclear intentions," he told reporters.

<http://uk.news.yahoo.com/26102005/325/iran-president-wants-israel-wiped-map.html> -- Oct. 26, 2005)

Opening Statement, Chairman Tom Coburn, M.D.

Iran's History of Terrorism

There should be no doubt that Iran isn't just blustering here. Iran has a record of carrying out its threats. Iran's history of supporting murderous terrorist activities speaks for itself. That's why the U.S. has, for the ninth consecutive year in a row, listed Iran as the "most active" state sponsor of terrorism.

This is what the State Department said in its Country Report on Terrorism for Iran:

"During 2004, Iran maintained a high-profile role in encouraging anti-Israeli terrorist activity, both rhetorically and operationally. Supreme Leader Khamenei praised Palestinian terrorist operations, and Iran provided Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist groups — notably HAMAS, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command — with funding, safe haven, training, and weapons. Iran provided an unmanned aerial vehicle that Lebanese Hezbollah sent into Israeli airspace on November 7, 2004."

None of this is new for Iran's Islamist regime. Who can forget the harrowing hostage drama 25 years ago that played out on the world stage for over a year? Or Iran's complicity in the terrorist murder of 200 innocent Americans at a U.S. Marine base in Beirut, only a few years later?

Iran's Human Rights Record

Americans, however, have hardly been the only victims of Iran's Islamist regime. On the contrary, Iran's human rights record with its own people is well documented. The State Department's latest human rights report on Iran describes gross violations against the Iranians themselves. They include political killings and executions following mock trials. The regime outlaws dissent and the punishment is death for such crimes as "attempts against the security of the State, outrage against high-ranking officials and insults against the memory of Imam Khomeini and against the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic." A photographer who dared to take pictures of a Teheran prison was killed in police custody. No one was ever punished for her murder.

Iran's Nuclear Program

In light of Iran's murderous intentions around the world, nuclear proliferation by the regime is a serious threat. So let's talk about where they are in that process.

All experts agree that Iran has been working in secret for some time to develop a nuclear weapon. In August 2002, an Iranian dissident group, the National Council for Iranian Reform, informed the world that Iran had secret uranium-enrichment facilities and was building a heavy water plant. Conveniently, shortly thereafter, Iran issued a series of public claims about its entrée into supposedly legitimate nuclear power projects. These "projects" were then used as a cover to explain why the regime was acquiring facilities needed to complete a nuclear fuel cycle,

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including a uranium-conversion facility, uranium-enrichment facility, a fuel-fabrication plant, and a facility to produce uranium oxide.

Defense Intelligence Agency officials testified earlier this year that Iran is likely to develop nuclear weapons sometime early next decade. In August of this year, the Washington Post, citing U.S. intelligence sources, concurred that Iran's nuclear program may already be so advanced as to produce a nuclear weapon within six to ten years.

Ending Nuclear Proliferation in Iran

Today, we'll hear testimony about how the U.S. can effectively address the threat of Iran's nuclear program. More broadly, we'll also address the issue of our overall U.S. policy toward the rogue regime, since the two are necessarily linked.

Some have argued that containment of Iran's nuclear threat lies with the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the likelihood of success of the IAEA process in convincing Iran to dismantle its nuclear weapons program. I'm also eager to hear about other diplomatic options available to the U.S. that could deter Iran's attempt to obtain a nuclear weapon, such as President Bush's Proliferation Security Initiative.

Unveiled by the President in 2003, supported initially by 16 countries, and now an estimated 60 countries, the objective of the initiative is to create counter-proliferation partnerships that work together to hamstring the efforts of global bad actors to trade in weapons of mass destruction and missile-related technology.

In addition to trying to thwart trade in weapons and technology, we need to follow the money. There are a number of countries that have financial contracts with Iran that may be helping to support Iran's nuclear ambitions. For example, Russia has a contract to provide Iran nuclear reactors. I'm interested to hear our witnesses' views on how these financial ties corrupt voting patterns on Iran at the IAEA and the U.N. Security Council.

Promoting Democracy in Iran

But our policy must be much broader than simply trying to shut down proliferation, both technologically and economically. We have to get at the root cause of the problem. That means investing in efforts to undermine the ideology that would promote the slaughter of innocent civilians by the masses. This ideology is not only directed at so-called enemies such as the U.S. citizens, but at fellow Muslims, at women and children, students, small business owners, wedding parties, all just innocently trying to live their lives. The people of Iran do not embrace this ideology. The people of Iran, like all people everywhere, yearn for freedom, prosperity and peace. It is critical that the U.S. and the international community build and strengthen democratic efforts within Iran. Democracies tend not to threaten other democracies. When Iran is free, when Iran is open, when Iran honors the dignity of each human person, Iran's neighbors will be able to relax. When Iran is safe for Iranians – Iran will be safe for the world.