

Statement of the Honorable Christopher J. Dodd

October 6, 2009

Hearing: "Minimizing Potential Threats from Iran"

Welcome.

Today we confront a serious threat to our nation's security and global stability: the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran.

If Iran were to acquire a nuclear weapons capability, it would pose a serious threat to peace and security in the Middle East, especially to our close ally Israel.

At our last Iran hearing in July, Senator Shelby and I agreed to hear from the Obama administration before moving forward on sanctions legislation. Much has happened in that time.

Last week in Geneva, after revealing another covert uranium enrichment facility in Iran, the Administration held its first diplomatic meetings with Iran and the other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany.

Under Secretary of State William Burns met one-on-one with Iran's chief nuclear negotiator.

This dialogue demonstrated the United States' commitment to pursuing every avenue to push Iran to come clean on its nuclear program and abide by international non-proliferation commitments.

President Obama described the talks as a "constructive beginning": participants agreed to follow-up talks later this month, the International Atomic Energy Agency is to be granted access to Iran's uranium enrichment site at Qum, and Iran has indicated a willingness, in principle, to export low-enriched uranium to Russia and France for processing for medical uses.

Whether Tehran will keep these commitments -- or if they will prove to be yet another stall tactic to avoid tougher sanctions -- remains to be seen.

And, the situation is increasingly urgent—over the weekend, the New York Times reported that IAEA scientists believe Iran has enough sensitive data to assemble a nuclear weapon.

Ultimately, we will only succeed if Iran's leaders are persuaded to cooperate or face sustained, progressively intensifying multilateral economic and diplomatic pressure on their government—including tougher sanctions.

They must make a clear choice: come clean on their nuclear program, suspend enrichment, and stop supporting terrorists around the world--or continue to deepen their international isolation.

Increased international pressure and the specter of biting sanctions are clearly what have brought Iran to the table for substantive talks.

Worldwide condemnation of Tehran's secret enrichment activities, its human rights abuses and post-election crackdown have unified the international community to intensify the pressure on Iran's leaders.

We must not let up now.

I intend to bring move forward in this Committee this month on comprehensive sanctions legislation. I am committed to ensuring that this Congress equips President Obama with all the tools he needs to confront the threats posed by Iran.

Just as last year, we will incorporate the best of our Senate colleagues' contributions into one original Committee bill, including: penalties on companies that support Iran's import of refined petroleum products or bolstering its domestic capacity, advanced by Senators Bayh, Lieberman, and Kyl; and authorization for state and local governments to divest from companies involved in critical business with Iran, sponsored by Senators Brownback and Casey. In addition, our legislation will further tighten our trade embargo on Iran; enhance Treasury's mandate to freeze assets tied to Iran's terrorist and proliferation activities; and help cut off Iran's access to the most sensitive and advanced technology available, through tougher export controls on these products sent to Iran through its blackmarket trading partners.

I hope our legislation will complement and reinforce ongoing diplomatic efforts, and send a clear signal to Iran's leaders of what's in store if they continue to defy the will of the international community.

We are fortunate to be joined today by some of the Administration's chief architects of Iran policy. Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg will elaborate on ongoing diplomatic efforts to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions, assess our chances for success, and survey policy options.

Under Secretary of the Treasury Stuart Levey joins us once again. A welcome hold-over from the Bush Administration, he will discuss the tough targeted financial measures employed against Iran and explore with us other pressure points in the global financial system that could be employed against Iran's government.

And finally, we will hear from Acting Under Secretary of Commerce Dan Hill. It has been over 2 years since the Bush Administration proposed restricting export licenses to countries where sensitive technology flows to rogue nations such as Iran via third countries, combating blackmarket proliferation networks which flourish throughout Asia and the Middle East.

But first, we will hear from two of our colleagues, Senator Casey and Senator Brownback, who will describe their legislation currently under review by the committee on the role of divestment from firms doing business in Iran's energy sector. We welcome them to the hearing. Senator Shelby?