

Statement by Gary Samore
Vice President for Global Security and Sustainability
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

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And Governmental Affairs
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International Security
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Meeting Iran's Nuclear Challenge

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for giving me this opportunity to discuss the Iranian nuclear issue.

I would like to briefly discuss the main technical conclusions of the study on Iran produced by the London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) in September, and then I will focus most of my remarks on the diplomatic state-of-play concerning international efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.

First, from a technical standpoint, the IISS study concludes that Iran still faces a number of hurdles before it achieves a nuclear weapons capability, as measured by its ability to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons.

Even if Iran tried to go for a bomb as quickly as possible, we estimate that it

would take several years - we say a minimum of 5 years – before Iran could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a single bomb. This represents the time required to complete and then operate a pilot scale centrifuge plant to produce 20-25 kilograms of weapons-grade uranium. It would take Iran a longer period of time – over a decade – to complete industrial scale enrichment facilities or facilities to produce and separate significant quantities of plutonium to support a more substantial nuclear weapons program.

None of these technical barriers are fatal, but they create space and time for international efforts to deny Iran a nuclear weapons capability.

Unfortunately, the effectiveness of diplomatic efforts over the past two and a half years, since Iran's secret nuclear activities were first publicly revealed, has been decidedly mixed. On one hand, to avoid referral to the UN Security Council, which Tehran fears could lead to political isolation, economic sanctions, and even military attack, Iran has been compelled to cooperate with investigations by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) into its nuclear secrets and to suspend key elements of its enrichment activities since October 2003. On the other hand, Iran has adamantly rejected all diplomatic efforts to permanently cease its fuel cycle

program in exchange for assistance to its nuclear power program and other economic and political inducements offer by European negotiators.

Similarly, Iran is very unlikely to accept the current Russian proposal for partial Iranian ownership of an enrichment facility on Russian soil in return for ending its indigenous enrichment program.

In other words, Iran has made tactical concessions under pressure to accept limits or delays in its nuclear fuel cycle program, but it has not been willing to abandon the program altogether at any price. This seems to reflect a deeply held and long standing conviction among all major elements of Iran's leadership that Iran needs to acquire a nuclear weapons option, although Iranians claim there are different views on the wisdom of actually building nuclear weapons. Under these circumstances, the immediate diplomatic objective is to maintain pressure to delay the program by keeping the suspension in place and requiring Iran to cooperate with the IAEA investigations.

Unfortunately, Tehran calculates that the balance of power is shifting in its direction, reducing the risk of referral to the UN. From Tehran's standpoint, the tight oil and gas market affords protection against the risk of economic

sanctions, and the US entanglement in Iraq provides protection against the risk of US military attack. Nonetheless, Tehran has acted cautiously. In August, Tehran resumed operations at the Esfahan Uranium Conversion facility, converting yellowcake into UF₆, while maintaining the suspension on the manufacture, installation, and operation of centrifuge machines at the Natanz enrichment plant. Moreover, Iran has continued to dribble out enhanced cooperation with the IAEA, allowing additional access to the Parchin military testing facility, where it is suspected of conducting weaponization experiments. Using these salami tactics, Iran has successfully defeated Western efforts at the IAEA Board of Governors meeting to refer Iran to the UN Security Council.

The near term danger, Mr. Chairman, is that Iran will calculate that it has a window of opportunity to advance its nuclear program further by lifting the suspension on some or all of its enrichment activities, while continuing to cooperate with IAEA inspections. The challenge is to mobilize strong international support for enrichment as a red line, having already failed to enforce conversion as the trigger for referral. The key is Russia and China. Certainly, both Moscow and Beijing share the Western view that Iran is seeking to develop a nuclear weapons capability, and they have privately

warned Iran not to resume enrichment. But, it is not clear that Moscow and Beijing are prepared to support referral to the UN Security Council if Iran resumes its enrichment program or that they would support serious international pressure on Iran in the event that referral takes place and Iran refuses to restore the suspension. Basically, Russia and China do not want to be dragged into a confrontation over Iran's nuclear program, which could jeopardize their relations with Iran as well as their overall relations with the U.S. and European powers. Therefore, we need to convince Moscow and Beijing that the best way to avoid a crisis is to convince Iran not to aggravate the situation by resuming enrichment. That requires a strong warning by Russia and China to Iran not to expect protection if Iran decides to breach the enrichment redline. Confronted with such a threat, Iran may decide that it has no choice but to keep the suspension in place for the time being, which could create conditions for resuming formal negotiations.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I look forward to responding to your questions and comments.