

World Affairs Council of Philadelphia's

2006 Model Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings

Topic: 1 U.S. Policy Towards Iran

Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism

Chairman: John E. Sununu (R-NH)

Ranking Member: Bill Nelson (D-FL)

Members: Norm Coleman (R-MN)

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

George V. Voinovich

John F. Kerry

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Barbara Boxer

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Lamar Alexander

Overview

Since 1979, the United States has had a strained relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Today Tehran is making news for its nuclear weapons program and its support of terrorism. The main bone of contention is that Iran is refusing to halt its uranium enrichment program saying that it is being used for peaceful purposes. Until May of 2006 the US government refused direct negotiation, deferring this duty to the European Union; so far, talks have been fruitless. In recent statements, the country has threatened to use its nuclear potential against American interests in the Middle East. Iran is also suspected of interfering in Iraq; there is some evidence that Iranian agents have infiltrated the southern part of the country and have provided them with weapons and training. It is also the backer of Hezbollah and Hamas and possibly al-Qaeda. In the summer of 2006 Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers, which has lead to the recent conflagration in Lebanon. Iran is increasingly becoming a great threat to global security. It is widely suspected that these recent actions are to assert a pan-Shiite dominance of the Middle-East.

The United States is in the position where it is forced to decide whether to negotiate with a regime that is willingly defying the international community's efforts. There are the possibilities of sanctions, military action, or by supporting dissidents. This is a choice that needs to be made carefully because of the importance of this issue.

Background

Despite the extraordinarily high danger that is posed, it seems that Iran has been antagonizing the U.S. in order to distract its population from reform issues to ones of security. Many Iranians are demanding economic reform, as witnessed by the election of current President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. His platform was not for foreign policy, but for his promise of improving the flaccid domestic economy. The president, however, has focused on foreign policy and is trying to antagonize the rest of the world. For some Iranians who are concerned about day to day survival this has not set well. For example 40% of Iranians live below the poverty line and there was an 11.2% unemployment rate in 2004(CIA World Factbook). Iran's chief export,oil, is at a record high right now, however most of this money has been going to the upper classes and the Ayatollahs who run the country. There are several different opposition groups ranging from Royalist to Marxist. However, it is not known how much popular support each group has inside the country.

Iran's Government

There is a history of the United States and western powers involving themselves in the domestic affairs of Iranians. For example the United State and England overthrew the democratically elected President of Iran in 1953, Mohammad Mossadegh, because he was opposed to the US interests at that time. This event and ultimate distrust of the West can be traced to the present, where many Iranians are generally supportive of their country's nuclear effort as a way to counter a long history of being pushed around by the West and this is a way to protect them selves. However, it is suggested that the Ayatollahs want to acquire weapons for different religious reasons.

US Security

The Iranian government is unwilling to accept such things as security guarantees from the US and the European Union and membership into the WTO. Instead of stopping their program they are continuing to develop it and make anti-American statements as can be seen in the following quote from the BBC:

The Ayatollah launched a scathing attack on the US, which he said was the most hated country in the world. "How do you talk about human rights and opposition to terrorism when your government has prisons like Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib?" he asked. He said the US was trying to influence world public opinion with their "frenzied propaganda" (BBC).

Furthermore, Iran has threatened to cut off its shipments of oil if attacked and this could place the global economy into turmoil. Iran has the world's second biggest proven oil reserve after Saudi Arabia and the second biggest gas reserves after Russia. It supplies 5% of the World's oil (BBC).

Iran's military could pose a threat to US strategic interests in the area. Iran's missiles are capable of hitting Israel and the European Union. It has supplied Hezbollah with missiles and has threatened Israel with destruction.

Possible drawbacks and benefits of a US invasion of Iran.

The most important drawbacks would involve oil. Since oil is important for our economy an invasion would most likely force up prices which potential could negatively affect the US economy. Another drawback would be the use of more military forces. Many Americans have been displeased with Americans being killed daily in Iraq and would most likely not want to engage in another conflict. An invasion may necessitate the re-institution of a draft, which would be very unpopular among the American people. It is widely suspected that Iran supports terror groups, for example Hezbollah. This can be seen in the following quote from the New York Times:

“While the United States says it is determined to resolve its disputes with Iran through diplomatic means, many officials and political analysts in Iran say they fear that President Bush will use force against Iran before he leaves office. With that in mind, present and former Iranian security officials said they were counting on, even stoking, the sense of religious connection to Iraq as well as to fellow Shiites in places like India and Saudi Arabia, as part of a defensive strategy”. (New York Times).

Possible benefits of a US invasion of Iraq would be that we would be installing a more friendly pro-West government in the Middle East that would serve as an example to the rest of the Muslim world and would guarantee us stable prices of oil. A more conciliatory government would remove a threat to the Iraqi government and help restore stability to the region.

Conclusion

The U.S. faces a hard set of questions and decisions when it comes to Iran. Should it negotiate with a regime that is anti-American or should it advance a hostile stance that includes sanctions if it does not comply with current laws or possibly even war. Or is there some middle way to reconcile the issues between the two countries? The subcommittee needs to weigh what direction our relationship with Iran should go because of its strategic importance to the U.S.

Definition of terms

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD's)

Refers to biological, chemical or nuclear weapons, which are used for non peaceful purposes, these weapons have been prevalent since WWI. Iran is suspected of wanting to make nuclear weapons, which can be put in bombs or on missiles.

Theocracy

Refers to a government that is ruled by religious leaders such as Iran, Iran has been ruled by religious leaders since 1979

Enrichment of Uranium

Is the process of turning fuel into use of energy, Iran is suspected of using this fuel not for peaceful purposes but for use in nuclear weapons.

Questions

1. Is it the right thing to do to negotiate with a regime that holds opposite values to the United States?
2. Would negotiations yield any results or would just be a waste of time?

Research links

3. What is the level of opposition to the government among the Iranian people?
4. Would the US armed forces be able to invade Iran while still being occupied with Iraq?
5. What is Iran's association with terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas and the insurgency in Iraq?

Works Cited

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4688984.stm

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ir.html>

Iran Witnesses

Trudy Rubin

Philadelphia Inquirer: Worldview Columnist

Writes extensively about Iraq and could describe Iranian influence within Iraq.

Donald Rumsfeld

United States Secretary: Defense

Could talk about our plans for an invasion of Iran, might favor invasion to root out Iranian influence in Iraq.

C. David Welch

Assistant Secretary: Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs

Would talk about diplomatic efforts with Iran, he would favor more negotiations with Tehran.

Javad Zarif

Ambassador: Iran to the United Nations

He would represent the position of Iran.

Reza Pahlavi

Son of the Late Shah of Iran: Heir to the Iranian Throne

He would favor regime change, with the restoration of the Monarchy.

William Kristol

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He would favor regime change in Iran.

Dr. Ahura Khaleghi Yazdi

Head: Haka movement for Freedom and Democracy in Iraq

He would favor regime change in Iran also and he be put in charge.

Kenneth M. Pollack

Director: Research Saban Center for Middle East Policy and Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute

He would favor regime change also, because he views Iran to be harmful to the U.S.

Reuel Marc Gerecht

Resident Fellow: American Enterprise Institute

He would favor regime change.

Robert Baer

Former: CIA Case Officer He could talk about Iran's nuclear capabilities and terrorist capabilities.

Vali Nasr

Professor: School of Naval Postgraduate Studies

Believes regime change would not work and that there is a war between Sunnis and Shiites throughout the Middle East and that we need to engage Iran.