



Secretary Rice Travels to Israel and the... | Daily Press Briefing | What's New

U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

KEYWORD SEARCH
[Subject Index](#)  BOOKMARK   ...

[Home](#) [Issues & Press](#) [Travel & Business](#) [Countries](#) [Youth & Education](#) [Careers](#) [About State](#)  Video

You are in: [Bureaus/Offices Reporting Directly to the Secretary](#) > [Deputy Secretary of State](#) > [Former Deputy Secretaries of State](#) > [Former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage](#) > [Remarks](#) > [2003](#)

U.S. Policy and Iran

Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State

Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Washington, DC
October 28, 2003

As Prepared

Chairman Lugar, Senator Biden, Members of the Committee, as always, I welcome the opportunity to appear before this body to discuss the foreign policy priorities and challenges of the day. I particularly appreciate this opportunity to discuss Iran, given the high stakes of this very fluid situation and the importance and influence of U.S. policy on this matter. I look forward to a dialogue with you.

Iran is a country in the midst of a tremendous transformation, and I believe American policy can affect the direction Iran will take. This is a complex situation, but if you will allow a simplification: today in Iran, there is a struggle between destructive elements of Iran's society and leadership, who want to keep the country mired in a violent, corrupt, and insular past, and a forward-looking popular movement, which wants a more engaged and modern Iran to emerge. The fact that the Nobel Peace Prize was just awarded to an Iranian citizen is no aberration; rather it is a sign of the sweeping desire for change across Iranian society. Indeed, all Iranians stand to benefit from a modern state, one that draws on the strengths of free minds and free markets. American and international security and well being also stand to benefit. United States policy is, therefore, to support the Iranian people in their aspirations for a democratic, prosperous country that is a trusted member of the international community.

Given the complexities of the situation, it is no surprise that there is a range of views – including on this Committee – about how to best implement that policy. That is entirely appropriate. Indeed, a single, static, one-size-fits-all policy would not be appropriate in the circumstances. In order to best protect and advance U.S. interests, our policy needs to be flexible, dynamic, and multifaceted. That is why the President and this Administration are pursuing a policy that weighs the full range of options available to us, both through bilateral and multilateral means. We seek to counter the government of Iran's negative and destructive policies and actions, while encouraging constructive policies and actions and engaging in a direct dialogue with the Iranian people about the freedoms they want for their own country.

As President Bush noted when talking about Iran last week, not every policy issue needs to be dealt with by force. Secretary Powell also noted last week that we do not seek conflict with Iran. We will continue to pursue nonproliferation and other such control measures as necessary and we must keep all available options on the table, given the lack of clarity about Iran's future direction and ultimate destination. At the same time, we are prepared to engage in limited discussions with the government of Iran about areas of mutual interest, as appropriate. We have not, however, entered into any broad dialogue with the aim of normalizing relations.

There is no question that Iran is engaged in a number of destructive policies and actions. Our most pressing concerns are Iran's poor human rights record, nuclear weapons program, as well as chemical and biological weapons programs, support for terrorism, and interference in regional politics, particularly in the Arab-Israeli peace process. These behaviors, along with the government's oppressive and corrupt centralized economic policy, shake the confidence of the international community and deny the Iranian people the quality of life commensurate with the country's rich human and natural resources. These behaviors also undermine regional stability and have ripple effects across U.S. and international security. We are taking and will take the necessary measures to protect U.S. interests.

Across the board, the United States is actively countering such Iranian activities through a variety of tools, including sanctions, interdiction, law enforcement, diplomacy, and international public opinion. When necessary, we will act alone. The United States, for example, has a broad array of sanctions on Iran. This includes prohibitions on a range of exports and assistance, particularly to the military and to the oil industry, strict regulations on economic transactions, and targeted sanctions against specific entities in other countries that aid Iran's weapons of mass destruction programs.

We believe, however, that international and multilateral responses – if sustained – will be especially effective in meeting the challenges Iran poses to regional stability, disarmament and nonproliferation regimes, and the rights of its own citizens. As President Bush said last week, we have confidence in the power of patience and the collective voice of the international community to resolve disputes peacefully.

We are working with the international community to effect change in Iran's abysmal human rights record, for example. According to our own documentation and to international organizations, the government of Iran uses torture, excessive and lethal police force, and arbitrary detention to repress free speech, freedom of association, and religious freedom, among other abuses. We are actively seeking a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran in the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee or at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

We believe a united international front is especially critical in dealing with Iran's clandestine nuclear weapons program, about which there is widespread concern across the international community. We also remain concerned about Iran's biological and chemical weapons and ballistic missile programs. Our efforts to counter these programs include bilateral discussions with allies and friends, such as President Bush's meeting with Russian President Putin at Camp David, where the two leaders agreed on the goal of an Iran free of nuclear weapons. We consistently have urged our friends and allies to condition any improvements in their bilateral or trade relations with Iran on concrete, sustained, and verifiable changes in Iran's policies in this and other areas of concern. We think it is appropriate, for instance, that the European Union has conditioned progress in its Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Iran on movement in these areas.

Our international efforts also include the use of innovative and established multilateral tools. The Proliferation Security Initiative, for example, is a new counterproliferation initiative to interdict weapons of mass destruction-related shipments to and from states and non-state actors of proliferation concern. The nations involved in this initiative have singled out Iran and North Korea as countries of particular concern. We are, of course, also working through the International Atomic

Energy Agency (IAEA) to resolve critical international concerns about Iran's nuclear program.

Indeed, our close cooperation with Russia, the European Union, and a host of other countries has led to two very strong IAEA Board of Governors' resolutions on Iran. Last week, the French, German, and British Foreign Ministers traveled to Iran in support of those resolutions. As a result of that mission, Iran declared its intention to sign an Additional Protocol to the safeguards agreement with the IAEA, provide full cooperation to the IAEA, and temporarily suspend uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities. We welcome this progress, but as British Foreign Minister Straw said, "the proof of the value" of the European agreement with Iran will depend "above all on the implementation of what has been agreed." We are waiting to see if the information Tehran provided the IAEA last week will substantively meet the IAEA Board of Governors' October 31st deadline for coming clean on its nuclear program. Our consultations with our allies on this matter are continuing.

We are also engaged in bilateral and multilateral efforts, from sanctions to direct appeals, to put a stop to Iran's support for terrorist organizations, which we believe includes al-Qaida. We believe that elements of the Iranian regime have helped al-Qaida and Ansar al-Islam transit and find safehaven in Iran, despite Iran's official condemnation of these groups. Despite public statements that they would cooperate with other countries, the Iranians have refused repeated requests to turn over or share intelligence about all al-Qaida members and leaders they claim to have in custody. As the President made clear last week, Iran must change its course on this front; resolution of this issue would be an important step in U.S.-Iranian relations and we cannot move forward without this step. We will continue to press this issue from the highest levels of our government, as well as to encourage our friends and allies to press the Iranians.

In its support for terrorism, including by arming violent factions, Iran is interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and Iraq, and especially in the fate of the Palestinian people. Indeed, Iran continues to be the world's foremost state supporter of terrorism, offering financial and logistical support to both Shia and Sunni terrorist organizations, including Hizballah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Through these abhorrent groups, Iran destabilizes the region and tries to stymie any movement toward peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict.

On the other hand, Iran says it wants a stable, unified neighbor in both Afghanistan and Iraq and despite significant unhelpful interference, has taken a few steps in that direction. This includes rhetorical support, by welcoming the end of the oppressive regime of the Taliban, which exported drugs, violence, and millions of refugees across the border into Iran. Iran also welcomed the formation of the Iraqi Governing Council. The Iranians have backed up that rhetoric with pledges of material support at both the Bonn and Madrid Donors' Conferences and they continue to cooperate with regional counter-narcotics and refugee repatriation efforts.

Although we make no conclusions about the nature of Iranian intent, we have encouraged such constructive behavior by engaging in direct dialogue on issues of mutual and immediate concern. This dialogue has been limited in scope and produced some success in the Afghanistan context. The last such meeting was canceled after the May 12 Riyadh bombings, however, due to Iran's unwillingness to cooperate on the al-Qaida issue. The Secretary made clear at the time that we canceled only a meeting, not the process of discussing these issues with Iran. We are prepared to meet again in the future, but only if that would serve U.S. interests. Of course, we can remove any country from the list of state supporters of terrorism if that country is prepared to take the necessary steps. We are always prepared to respond if Iran changes its ways, in particular ceasing its support for terrorism and abandoning its weapons of mass destruction programs, by making corresponding changes in our own policies.

An important aspect of ongoing U.S. efforts to influence the direction of Iranian policy is encouraging the healthy development

of Iran's civil society. We see many signs that the people of Iran want a different life and a more responsive government, and we believe we can encourage such developments through direct engagement with the Iranian public. An estimated 70 percent of the 68 million people in Iran are under the age of 30, and they are far more concerned about Iran's chronic unemployment than they are about Iran's past. Iranian displays of sympathy after the September 11th attacks and polls showing overwhelming desire for improved relations with the U.S. reflect strong popular sentiment, as do demonstrations and elections in support of reform. The government tries to blame any sign of dissent on outside agitators, but it is clear that the agitation in Iran is a genuine expression of a homegrown desire for change. Consider that thousands of ordinary Iranians spontaneously flocked to the airport to greet Shirin Ebadi two weeks ago when she returned to Tehran after the announcement of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize.

We believe we can encourage the triumph of public resolve by engaging in direct communication with the people of Iran. We are doing this through Radio Farda, which operates 24 hours a day, and Voice of America (VOA) radio and television broadcasts into Iran. VOA has recently instituted a daily Persian television news program to Iran, in addition to its two weekly television feature programs. In May, the State Department brought on line a website in Persian and we continue to explore opportunities to incorporate Iran-related projects into our broader Middle East Partnership Initiative. Our Education and Cultural Affairs Bureau also supports cultural, educational, and professional exchanges.

We know our message is getting through. An average of 3,000 people already views our Persian website every day, for example. It is challenging to come by concrete measures of the audience for our television and radio programming inside Iran, but we do have evidence of a broad consumer base. The United States has no direct diplomatic presence in Iran, but we do have what we call a "virtual embassy" in the surrounding nations and beyond. Foreign Service Officers talk to Iranian citizens living and traveling across the region and around the world, collecting and sharing with us their observations. Based on such anecdotal evidence and on the direct contacts we get, particularly through the Internet, we know we have an attentive audience in Iran.

I firmly believe that our strategy will succeed in helping to push and pull Iran in the right direction, particularly with the close cooperation of other nations. But it is not up to the United States to choose Iran's future. Ultimately, I am most hopeful for that future because it is the people of Iran themselves who are providing the key impetus for change. Despite living under a regime that limits or denies its people even basic human rights, Iranians are engaged in a very rich and lively debate about the kind of society they want for themselves and for their children. They have made it clear that they want democratic and economic reform, accountability and transparency from their government, an end to corruption, religious moderation, and reintegration with the international community. The Iranian people should know of our support for their aspirations, but also that the full rewards of that support will only be realized once their government ends its destructive external and internal policies. We look forward to the day when the will of the people of Iran prevails.

Released on October 28, 2003





[Updates](#) | [Frequent Questions](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Email this Page](#) | [Subject Index](#) | [Search](#)

The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

[About state.gov](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Copyright Information](#) | [Other U.S. Government Information](#)