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Gerhard Schroeder says a US threat of force against Iran is unacceptable.
 (AFP)

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has rejected the threat of military force against Iran, hours after US President George Bush said he would consider it as a last resort to press Tehran to give up its nuclear program.

Iran angered the European Union and the United States by resuming uranium conversion at its Isfahan plant last Monday.

It resumed the work after rejecting a European Union (EU) offer of political and economic incentives in return for giving up its nuclear program.

Mr Schroeder, one of the most prominent European opponents of the US-led war in Iraq, told an election rally in his home city of Hanover that the threat of force was not acceptable.

"I am worried about developments there because no-one can want the Iranian leadership to gain possession of atomic weapons," Mr Schroeder said.

"The Europeans and the Americans are united in this goal. Up to now we were also united in the way to pursue this.

"This morning I read that military options are now on the table. My answer to that is: 'Dear friends in Europe and America, let us work out a strong negotiating position. But let's take the military option off the table. We have seen it doesn't work'," he said.

'All options on table'

The comments came after Mr Bush told Israeli television that "all options are on the table", including the use of force.

Mr Bush added that he was "sceptical" that Europe's diplomatic approach to Iran would work.

Tehran says it aims only to produce electricity and denies Western accusations it is seeking a nuclear bomb.

Mr Schroeder's opposition to the Iraq war was seen as a decisive factor in his unexpected victory in the 2002 general election, which he won narrowly after coming from behind.

Germany rejects Iran military option

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His critical stance caused serious ruptures in Germany's traditionally strong relations with the United States.

He faces another election this September.

Mr Schroeder's Social Democrats are currently lagging the opposition conservatives but the latter's lead has shrunk in recent weeks.

-Reuters

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