

CAN OBAMA UNTANGLE THE IRANIAN CHALLENGE?

PROSPECTS FOR A NEW IRAN POLICY

NOVEMBER 18, 2008



National Iranian American Council
www.niacouncil.org

Future of U.S.-Iran Policy – An Agenda for Change

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Special Addresses:

Chairman John Tierney (D-MA)

Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA)

Keynote Address:

Senator Thomas Carper (D-DE)

DR. TRITA PARSI: Good Afternoon. My name is Trita Parsi, I am the president of the National Iranian American Council. I welcome you to NIAC's conference titled "Can President-Elect Obama Untangle the Iranian Challenge? Prospects for a new Iran Policy."

Exactly two weeks ago, America made history. Americans turned out in record numbers and elected not only its first African-American president, but also a president whose election platform included a promise to pursue a new policy on Iran centered on diplomacy. Though criticized for this position during the general elections as well as during the primary, President-Elect Obama stood firm and argued that great nations talk to their enemies and do not consider

than 20 former U.S. diplomats and government officials, experts on Iran, and experts on the region. (See appendix)

The conveners of this diverse group of experts are the American Foreign Policy Project and ICAN, who partnered up with 3D Security and Just Foreign Policy in this truly collaborative effort to convene experts that could produce - what I believe is the only report - presenting a path to and the substance of a new policy centered on diplomacy.

Before we turn to our distinguished panel, let me first thank our sponsors. First and foremost, Chairman Tom Carper of Delaware who has been kind enough to sponsor this event and who later in the afternoon will give a key note address. On



"The time for a new Iran policy is now – thirty years of isolation and threats have done nothing to change Iranian behavior and advance U.S. interests."

- Dr. Trita Parsi, President,
National Iranian American Council

diplomacy a sign of weakness. This could provide real change in our Iran policy.

For the past thirty years, our policy has been dominated by sanctions, pressure and various forms of threats. During this period, there has been little if any change in Iranian behavior on Lebanon, on Israel and Palestine, on Iraq, and on the nuclear issue. And certainly, pressure alone has not helped change Iran's deplorable human rights record for the better. In fact, in the last few years, human rights violations in Iran have intensified significantly. Iran is one of the few countries in the world that still executes juveniles, in complete violation of its obligations under international law.

Clearly, the need for a new approach on Iran is increasingly recognized on all sides of the political spectrum. But can a policy centered on diplomacy yield a better result? Can it help stabilize the region? Can it end human rights violations? Can it prevent an Iranian nuclear bomb? Can it pacify the Iranian-Israel strategic rivalry? And if so what should be the components of such a new Iran policy – and what should be the substance of its diplomacy?

To help shed light on these issues, we are joined today by a most distinguished panel, and later in the afternoon, by some of our lawmakers that have shown the greatest leadership on this issue.

We are most privileged that two of the panelists will present a new "expert statement" on a new Iran policy signed by more

behalf of the National Iranian American Council, we would also like to thank the Ploughshares Fund, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The Pluralism Fund and the Kenbe Foundation, who have made this conference possible through their generous support.

So without any further ado, let us turn to our distinguished panel.

We are honored today to have as our first speaker Ambassador Jim Dobbins, from the RAND Corporation. For over three decades, Ambassador Dobbins has served both Republican and Democratic administrations in diplomatic roles around the world, often in times of crisis. He has served as Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, Special Adviser to the President and Secretary of State for the Balkans and perhaps most relevant to our discussion here today, as the Bush administration's Special Envoy for Afghanistan after 9/11.

In that capacity, we are particularly privileged to have Ambassador Dobbins with us here today, because in Afghanistan he successfully negotiated with the Iranians on how to create a new constitution for Afghanistan. The details of which you can find in his new book, *After the Taliban: Nation-Building in Afghanistan*. As a person who has successfully pursued diplomacy with Iran, Ambassador, we very are eager to benefit from your insights.

(Applause.)

AMBASSADOR JAMES DOBBINS: Thank you very much, Trita, and thank you for inviting me today. I'd also like to thank Richard Parker and the American Foreign Policy Project for all the work they put into creating the group, overseeing our discussions, and drafting a statement which a large and disparate group of diplomats, experts and former intelligence agents and others could agree, which is being released today.

My pretensions to being included in that group really do go back to my experiences in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 in 2001 when I was asked by the Bush administration to take charge of diplomacy associated with the invasion of Afghanistan, the overthrow of the Taliban, and the effort to put together a successor government. You know Americans looking back on that period



“While dialogue only sometimes produces agreement, it always produces information. And information allows wiser decision making.”

Ambassador James Dobbins,
RAND Corporation

have the misimpression that in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11, the United States put together a large international coalition and overthrew the Taliban. The truth is that the United States actually joined an existing coalition which had been combating the Taliban for most of a decade.

That coalition consisted of the Northern Alliance, the internal opposition to the Taliban, and the governments of Russia, India and Iran. It was the addition of American air power, and American influence with Pakistan, that removed Pakistan's support for the Taliban. Those two changes allowed that coalition to prevail. Those countries were also critically important not just to winning the war, but to consolidating the peace, to ensuring that we could move from a Taliban government to a fully recognized, fully legitimate, and broadly based alternative; that is, the government that eventually took office under Hamid Karzai.

In the aftermath of 9/11 and the fall of Kabul, the United Nations hosted a conference of all the other factions in Afghanistan with a view of trying to bring together those factions behind the new government. And participating in that, in addition to 30 or so Afghan leaders, were representatives of the governments that I've mentioned. And these governments all played critically important and quite helpful roles.

I can remember only a couple of days into the conference, the UN circulated the first draft of what was to be ultimately the final agreement. And this agreement was going to provide an interim constitution for the newly formed Afghan government. And we were sitting around, just three or four of us, looking over this draft, and commenting on it. And it was the Iranian delegate, who noted that there was something missing. And I said, 'oh, what's missing?' And he said, 'well, this draft doesn't make any mention of democracy or elections. Don't you think we should be committing the Afghans to a democratic system and holding elections?'

Now this was before the Bush administration had embraced democratization as the panacea for the Middle East. So I didn't have any particular instructions on it, but it did seem to be harmless, and maybe even a benign suggestion, so I agreed that was a good idea. The Iranian ambassador then went on with a certain sparkle in his eye to say there was something else missing. And I said, 'well, what was that?' And he said, 'well, there is no mention of international terrorism. Don't you think we ought to commit the new Afghan government to cooperate with the international community against terrorism?' And I admitted that that too was a helpful suggestion, and both of those were indeed incorporated in the draft.

But there was another more revealing and more important incident that came just at the conclusion of that conference. It was about 2:00 in the morning. The conference had gone a week overtime. People were about to leave. The German chancellor was supposed to arrive at 9:00 in the morning in order to officiate at the signing ceremony at which the results of the conference would be formalized.

And I got a desperate call from the UN chairman of the conference who said that the conference was going to collapse; that we were not going to have any agreement. And the reason was that the Northern Alliance, which was the most powerful of the four Afghan factions that were represented there, was insisting on having 18 of the 24 ministries in the new government, and all of the other factions said that's too much. That wouldn't be a balanced outcome. But the UN chairman had been unable to move the Northern Alliance, and was growing desperate.

I suggested that we get together the representatives of the various external governments that had been basically supporting a proxy war in Afghanistan for the past 20 years; that is to say, the United States, India, Russia, Iran, and bring them altogether to see if we could work on the Northern Alliance delegate.

So we assembled in the suite of the UN chairman, and we spent the next few hours trying to persuade the Northern Alliance representative to give up several more ministries to the other factions. We had no success. He was obdurate. And finally at about 4:00 in the morning, my Iranian colleague took the Northern Alliance delegate aside for no more than about 30 seconds, whispered in his ear, and the Northern Alliance delegate

came back and gave up four more ministries, and the conference concluded on that basis. So this was really pushing us across the goal line. It was this intervention that created the possibility for success.

In the immediate aftermath of the conference, we had another meeting in Tokyo where all the donors came together and said how much they were going to contribute to Afghanistan. On behalf of the United States at that conference, Colin Powell pledged \$390 million in assistance for Afghanistan. Iran pledged \$500 million. And on the fringes of that, the Iranian delegate, said that they would like to have broader discussions with the United States about the other issues on the Iranian-American agenda. And I said I only do Afghanistan. And they said, 'no, we understand. We just want you to let people in Washington know that we would like to discuss the other issues that divide us.'

The administration's reaction to that overture was delivered three weeks later when the president in his State of the Union message declared the Axis of Evil, which brought together Iran, its arch-enemy Iraq, and North Korea; and in which he threatened preemptive military action against all three if they didn't halt their nuclear programs.

The Iranians persisted, however, in trying to promote a broader dialogue with the United States. In March of that year we had another international meeting in Geneva, to talk about support for building a new Afghan army, and 40 countries came. And on the fringes of that the Iranians came and said they'd like to speak bilaterally, and we had a meeting. And they brought along an Iranian general in full uniform, and he told me that Iran was prepared to participate in a U.S. led program to rebuild the Afghan army, and as part of that they were prepared to house, to train and to equip up to 20,000 Afghan recruits.

And I said if you train some of these new recruits, and we train some of these new recruits, might not they end up having conflicting doctrines? And he said, 'oh, don't worry about that, Ambassador, we are still using the manuals you left behind in 1979.' So I said, all right, maybe they'd have a compatible doctrine, but they might have incompatible loyalties. And he said, 'you know, we trained, we equipped, and incidentally we are still the ones who are paying the troops that you are using in Southern Afghanistan to mop up any remaining Taliban. Are you having any difficulties with their loyalty?'

And I said 'no, not as far as I know, and that I would report this to Washington.' So I got back to Washington. I reported this to the secretary of state, Colin Powell, and he said, very interesting, you need to talk to Condi. I went over and saw the national security adviser, and she said, you need to talk to Don Rumsfeld. And so she organized a meeting with Powell and Rumsfeld in the White House situation room. I briefed the same sequence of events that I just told you about. The secretary of defense, who was jotting on papers he brought with him, didn't look up. Didn't ask any questions. No one else said anything. There was sort of a long pregnant pause. Then the meeting moved on to the next item on the agenda, and Iran never got an answer.

A year later in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq, the Iranians came forward with yet another proposal for a broader dialogue. This time it was more concrete. It was more spelled out. It was more comprehensive. And again they got no response at all. It's easy enough to see why the Iranians were so forthcoming at those particular moments. Just after we had invaded Afghanistan, and just after we had invaded Iraq. They were grateful, and they were frightened. They were grateful we just knocked off their two principal enemies, and they were frightened that they were next. So they were inclined to be accommodating.

On the U.S. side, I think the feeling was, 'what's the hurry? Every time we wait, they come forward with a better offer. We are going to have a democratic Afghanistan, a democratic Iraq, our position is going to be strengthened. In a year or two they'll be even more forthcoming, or maybe they will have gone away.' So there is no particular rush to answer them.

No of course that is not what's happened. Events moved in a different direction, and as a result now five years later the Iranian position has strengthened and hardened, and our position has hardened and weakened. And that's not exactly a formula for diplomatic breakthrough. But I do believe, and I think most of the people who have associated themselves with the joint statement presented today also believe that it's nevertheless worth trying.

Over the last year we've had a debate in the United States over how to deal or whether to deal with Iran. But it's important to recognize that the debate we've conducted is not between one group who believes that we should launch a preemptive military strike against Iran, and the other group who said we shouldn't. Rather it was a debate between one group who said we should talk to them first, and another group who said, 'no, we don't even have to talk to them first. That dialogue is not a necessary prequel to a preemptive strike.'

And so we still have a declaratory approach which says that if they ultimately don't agree with us, we will have to consider a preemptive military strike. Now insanity has been occasionally defined as continuing to do the same thing and expecting different results. If you examine the case for a military strike against Iran it looks remarkably similar to a recent incident. They're hostile. They're dangerous. They're unpredictable. They're undeterrable. And they are getting nuclear weapons, and we have to take military action to stop that. Well, we went through that once, and, I think most people — in particular most military people — believe that the consequences of doing this again would be even more negative, and less likely to be productive.

I believe that basing our approach to Iran on conditioned dialogue — that is, we'll only talk to you if you do certain things first — and on the implicit and even explicit threat of military action if they don't agree with us, in the end is not the best way of opening that kind of exchange. And a better way is to put the military option to the side. As long as the United States has a military, the possibility of military action can't be dismissed, but it can be significantly deemphasized, and one can move to a dialogue based on mutual respect and an effort to find common ground.



Now that is not going to be easy. I suggested that there were opportunities in 2001, 2002 and 2003. Those probably don't exist at the moment, but they may exist again. Iran has elections next year. We just had elections. And the balance of power is shifting back in our favor in Iraq. So I don't see that one should conclude that the opportunities that we had can't be repeated.

Dialogue with Iran is not going to lead to immediate results. I'm not one who believes we ought to craft a grand bargain, put it on the table, and expect that we are going to be able to settle the nuclear issue, the terrorism issue, the future of Israel issue, and the other disputes, and mutual grievances that burden this relationship. I do believe that while dialogue only sometimes produces agreement, it always produces information. And information allows wiser decision making. We'll be in a better position to make wiser decisions about how to handle Iran if we are enlightened as a result of having talked to them. And that is the core of my argument for engaging in a dialogue.

The simplest way of doing this is not to put ambitious proposals on the table, but simply to take the position that American diplomats and American representatives are no longer going to be under any special restrictions with respect to talking to Iranians. That is, they are allowed to talk to Iranians as they are to other adversaries and hostile nations based on their existing instructions, and their existing responsibilities. So the ambassador in Baghdad, the ambassador in Kabul, the ambassador in New York, the ambassador in Vienna at the IAEA, is free to engage the Iranians based on his existing instructions, and based on what he understands his responsibilities to be, just like we would other countries with whom we don't agree, and in some cases have quite hostile relationships.

That is not going to lead to immediate breakthroughs, but it is going to lead to immediate dialogue of some sort in all likelihood, and that will yield better information, a better range of choices, and better policy. Thank you.

(Applause.)

DR. TRITA PARSİ: Thank you Ambassador. Our next speaker is Professor Farideh Farhi, of the University of Hawaii. Recognized as one of America's foremost experts on Iran, she is the author of *States and Urban-Based Revolutions in Iran and Nicaragua*, along with numerous articles and book chapters on contemporary Iranian politics and foreign policy. She has taught at several universities in Iran and the U.S., and her research sponsors include the United States Institute of Peace, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where she was recently a Public Policy Scholar.

(Applause.)

DR. FARIDEH FARHI: Thank you very much for being here. I also would like to thank Richard Parker for putting together this proposal as well as the International Civil Action Group Network. And of course NIAC for putting this event together.

I'm an academic, and a person that has been studying Iran at least for the past 30 years of my life very intently. I began before the revolution. I was very much part of the student movement that thought something good was going to happen in Iran in 1970s, and obviously I was very disappointed in the consequent results. However, I am also a person that after the revolution went back to Iran, and worked and engaged in the Iranian civil society. I think I am the only person here that actually chaired a parent-teacher association in Iran. And therefore I know the contrast between the two societies.

But let me begin by essentially talking about two fundamental reasons why I have become convinced that a fundamentally new approach to Iran is needed at this juncture. First and foremost is what is explicitly laid out in the joint experts' statement on Iran — that the U.S. efforts to manage Iran through containment, isolation, threats, sanctions — have all been tried, on and off, literally for the past 30 years. And while there is ample evidence that economic sanctions and pressures on Iran and attempts at political isolation have harmed Iran, and the Iranian people economically, in particular hindering much needed foreign

investment in the Iranian oil and gas industry, there is absolutely no evidence that they have impacted Iran's behavior in the direction of compromise.

In fact there is ample evidence in the opposite direction, insofar as Iranian domestic politics are concerned, promoting a security-oriented outlook, bordering on paranoia, and a strident foreign policy.

The second reason for calling for a new approach at this particular junction which is a real concern of mine, and I think of many people involved in the project, is that in spite of the hopes generated in the wake of the American election, if the American approach to Iran does not change in fundamental ways, it could actually lead to the collapse of the as-yet unsuccessful efforts to rein in Tehran's nuclear program, and to a much more acrimonious and dangerous interaction.

This will happen, I argue, if engagement with Iran is not envisaged as a real attempt to resolve or at least ease tensions between the two countries, and instead ends up being a new policy isolating Iran. What has been known in the United States as the "carrot and stick" approach.

This is what is publicly discussed in United States when you talk about Iran. "Let's use sticks and carrots." And of course the Iranians' response is "What do you think we are? Donkeys?" A lot of people do not understand the kind of language that is being used here, and how humiliating it is to the Iranians to listen to it as it is being discussed publicly in the United States. But my essential concern is that if this policy continues in such a public

the dynamics, may end up having worse results than even the Bush administration achieved. So the reason for the completely new approach as far as I'm concerned is quite simple. This is something that the Iranian leaders have repeatedly pointed out, even if there have been few listeners here; that deadlines and red lines don't work with Iran. No matter how much you try, they will not work because of the structure of the Iranian political system.

The United States refusal or failure to understand how the Iranian system works, I think has been the source of ineffective policies toward Iran. In order to come up with effective policies you have to have a better understanding of Iranian politics, and base policies on a new conceptualization of Iranian politics. This new re-orientation must occur when the United States begins acknowledging that Iran's political system is very complex and not reducible to the whims, desires, and insecurities of individual political leaders.

U.S. leaders must begin to acknowledge that Iran has politics too, and there are certain things, including a sense that politicians or political factions giving in to the demands of external players is simply unacceptable in a country that has gone through a populist revolution.

In the case of Iraq, we have been negotiating with various political groups in Iraq with a clear understanding that Iraq has politics. It has different groups that have different points of view. In the case of Iran, we treat Iran as though it is a unified body that has a head, and we can go and tell them that this is



"If there is no prior commitment to improving the relationship, even unconditional talks will lead to a breakdown." -Dr. Farideh Farhi, University of Hawaii

manner, the end result will again be a collapse. Even if there are direct talks without preconditions, there will be a collapse of those talks.

Now as pointed out by Ambassador Dobbins, and I think it was pointed out repeatedly by President-Elect Obama — in fact it was his mantra during the election regarding policy in general — that you really cannot keep doing the same thing and expecting different results.

In the Iranian case, I would argue that doing the same thing with the new president, even with the addition of the direct talks to

what you have to do, and the guy will finally buckle under and say, 'okay'. He will look back to his flank and tell the people who have supported him, 'I have accepted it and you must as well.'

Obviously that is not the way politics works in Iran. Iran is a raucous political environment, and if you have been watching Iranian politics in the last two weeks, you can see ministers being impeached, new ministers barely losing in the election, and literally fights in the parliament, which shows that even within the power structure there is tremendous conflict and competition. Within this historical frame, and within this

reality of a highly competitive system in Iran, you simply cannot expect a moderate reaction from the Iranian political system in the face of foreign pressures and threats. Just like we experienced in the United States after 9/11, when under external attack the Iranian political environment has moved to the right and become more nationalistic.

Unless we accept that, or unless we want to claim that Iran is an abnormal country, there is absolutely no reason to think Iran will behave differently in the future under pressure or threats unless we assume that we can force Iran to do something. Secondly, once we force Iran to abandon its cherished nationalism or ultranationalism, will that have a positive effect on Iran, or will it create spoilers that will constantly try to undermine the new equilibrium that has been forced on Iran?

It is amazing to me that in the discussion of Iran, that not once is there a discussion of what happens if Iran is forced into doing something. People never question the possibility that there might be instability if Iran is forced to crack one way or another under tremendous pressure from outside. Let us say that the current leaders of Iran just disappear for a variety of reasons. The society includes many different factions. What do people expect? That those factions will just go home and suddenly elect a new leader that is wonderful? You cannot open a Pandora's Box and completely ignore the domestic dynamics of the country and assume that the end result will be good.

As a lifelong student of Iranian politics, I have no doubt that the Iranian moderation in fact will come the other way. And the only way the security-oriented environment that has been created in Iran can change is if this noose that has been put around the Iranian political system is in effect loosened. The Iranian civil society has tremendous energy in it, but when you put the noose around the society, you in effect undermine the society from behaving in a normal way. Loosening the noose will allow civil society to push for the kind of changes that the society can accept in a gradual way.

This is not something that America's foreign policy has done in the past. During the Clinton administration, when there was an attempt to engage the Iranian political system, the attempt was perceived in Iran, rightly or wrongly, as an extension of the hand was only toward one faction in Iranian politics. And obviously that was not an acceptable formula.

During the Bush administration, obviously, we have experienced politics of threat and pressure. But the U.S. decision to engage Iran on the basis of shared interests and identified concerns on both sides in a process of give and take is the only way that the Iranian conservative mistrust of the American intent to bring about regime change, or control of Iranian politics, can be alleviated.

I'm always amazed when I listen to the speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini, and there is never a time where he does not talk about the fact that we do not want to be the servants of the United States. The language of servitude is very powerful

within Iran's political context and its history of tortured relationships with the outside world.

Once Iran and the United States are engaged in a dialogue, and the policy of regime change is fully shelved, not only in words but also in actions, obviously issues of important concern for all of us who are interested in Iranian politics such as improvement in human rights and steps toward democracy, must be part of the conversation between United States and Iran, as they should be part of the conversation with every other country in the Middle East. However at this point, given the tortured history between the two countries, their selective invocation in relationship to Iran, and not other American allies, only reconfirms Tehran's suspicions about America's policy of regime change in Iran.

Let me end by just saying this: Iran is neither pre-invasion Iraq nor Libya, where agreement with the closely knit leadership circle can be used for a sudden reversal of decades-long policies. I know that people are going to be shocked at this but Iran is a country that is much closer in terms of characteristics to India. It's a very complex political system. You can never influence it from outside. Sustained relationship with such a country will eventually allow external forces to have an impact, but not determine the policy direction of the country. But sustained relations do not necessarily mean a good relationship on a sustained basis. Iran and the United States have fundamental differences on major regional issues. They also have shared interests. And those shared interests can be the basis for agreement. And of course differences have to be negotiated, and at times, ignored.

Expected ebbs and flows in such a relationship make a prior and serious commitment to eventual normalization on the part of both countries a necessity in order to prevent breakdown of dialogue caused by the smallest of disagreements or spoilers. If there is no prior commitment to improving the relationship, even unconditional talks will lead to a breakdown. Thank you.

(Applause.)

DR TRITA PARSI: Thank you so much, Farideh. Our last speaker before the Q&A is none other than, Joe Cirincione, President of the Ploughshares Foundation.

He took his new position at Ploughshares earlier this year after having directed nonproliferation and international policy programs at the Center for American Progress and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He worked for nine years on the professional staffs of the House Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Government Operations, and served as staff director of the bipartisan Military Reform Caucus. He is author of *Bomb Scare: The History and Future of Nuclear Weapons*.

(Applause.)

MR. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Thank you very much. I find that since I've become president of the Ploughshares Fund, I get a lot more speaking invitations. I always knew I was a

nice guy, but now many other people seem to think so.

(Laughter.)

Thank you very much, Trita, for that kind introduction, and thank you, NIAC, for sponsoring this important forum. And I want to thank the experts who have given us a very wise, comprehensive and balanced statement of policy. We could do a lot worse than follow the recommendations that they have laid out for us today.

In 63 days around the corner from where we now gather, Barack Obama will be sworn in as the 44th president of the United States. That is an event that makes many people in the United States more optimistic, more cheerful. Barack Obama enjoys a 70 percent approval rating currently. The National Park Service is preparing to host as many as four million people here for this event, the Washington Post reports today.

Whether it hits that number or not, it will almost certainly be the largest crowd of American citizens gathered for any event in our

driven into the president's agenda. It is not part of his campaign promise; it's not on his should-do list; it's not on his can-do list; it's on his must-do list. You have got to address the Iranian crisis.

Fortunately, the president brings with him a detailed and comprehensive policy approach to this problem. In fact I would argue that President-Elect Obama has the most progressive, most transparent, most comprehensive national security plan of any president elected in recent memory. He spoke about this repeatedly during the campaign when it wasn't very popular to take some of his positions. He put it up on his website, and it is now up on his transition website.

I don't believe a president has ever done this before. You can go to change.gov and read what the president has pledged to do about nuclear policy and about Iran in particular. And in that policy statement he is now pledging that he will have an open unconditional discussion with America's adversaries. And this is not a radical position. In fact the position that we wouldn't have discussions with our adversaries was the radical position



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-Joseph Cirincione, President,
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history. But after the inaugural address, after the parades, after the parties, Barack Obama will walk into the Oval Office, and find a desk brimming over with crises.

In Washington we call this the inheritance problem: The basket of unresolved issues that the next president of the United States will receive from his predecessor. In one bipartisan group I participated in at Georgetown University earlier this year, we debated whether this was the worst inheritance that any incoming president had ever received in U.S. history. The two contenders were Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt. It is no wonder that President-Elect Obama is reading books on those two presidents.

And in the foreign policy inbox, with all the issues that he has, near the top of the list will be Iran. This will be a situation that is

outside the mainstream of national security policy as practiced by Republicans and Democrats for decades.

The idea that we should talk with Iran is obvious to most national security experts. For example, five former secretaries of state endorsed negotiations with Iran at a recent policy forum here in town just two months ago.

Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski say of course we should talk with Iran in their new book, edited by David Ignatius, and in the policy panels that they've held around town. This is the obvious thing to do. This is what Barack Obama has said he will do. The question now changes from the what to the how. We are going to talk to Iran. How do we talk to Iran? What is the sequence? What is the timing? What is the content? This is the

matter that is not spelled out in the campaign statements, and that experts such as those on this panel today will have to weigh in on.

At the risk of being corrected by many of the Iranian experts in the crowd today and on the panel with me today, let me offer four modest recommendations. The first is on timing. I may be wrong, but my recommendation to the president would be: wait. Do not rush into this. He's shown no inclination to do that, but I would argue wait. Primarily because we want to see how domestic politics play out inside Iran in the very important parliamentary and presidential elections coming up early next year.

The president doesn't want to waste his time negotiating with a president that may be thrown out of power because of his dismal performance in both the economic sphere and domestic policy sphere. Nor does he want to be seen as giving President Ahmadinejad the credit for bringing America to the negotiating table. So that would indicate to me a policy of patience in the negotiations.

Two: That does not mean you don't engage Iran. You do it multilaterally. You do it as part of the other urgent agendas that you have, in particular, stabilizing Iraq and winning the war in Afghanistan. Iran is vital to both of those efforts. President Obama should initiate the kind of regional discussions, regional conferences, he's talked about, and this time bring Syria and Iran to the table, to show them that they will now be involved in creating new security arrangements for the Middle East. Iran will be respected, not ignored.

Third, clarify intentions. I believe that early in the administration President Obama should make clear that the United States has no intention of overthrowing the regime in Iran; that it is our intention, as he has stated during the campaign, to respect Iran's territorial integrity; to treat them as the regional power that they are; and to involve them in a dialogue of mutual respect in the pressing issues between our two countries, and in the region.

This might be the single best step he can take. Let me tell you why. You may have read in the New York Times last week the statement from the deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guard who warned against negotiating with Barack Obama, saying that he who wears the mask of friendship is more dangerous than he who opposes us directly. Words, by the way, strikingly similar to the words al-Qaeda used in denouncing Barack Obama and endorsing Senator McCain during the McCain. He who wears the mask of friendship is more dangerous.

And there are similar statements coming out from Iranian officials. How do we interpret this? I think there are two ways. One is that this is now prepositioning to negotiations. It's the equivalent of someone who has been standing outside the carpet shop, looking in the window, looking at the prices, making notes. When the carpet owner comes out and invites him in, he says, 'I don't want to buy a carpet. Why would I want to buy a carpet? I'm not even interested in a carpet.' It's

a way of improving your negotiating position by denying the value of what is now about to be offered you. That's number one.

Number two, is to take them at their word: they are right. Barack Obama is more dangerous to the established regime than the current administration. Because he takes away their prop. He takes away the American boogeyman. What is keeping Ahmadinejad in power besides his domestic apparatus? It isn't his economic performance. It isn't his social policies. It isn't his failed drive to root out corruption, the things he was elected on. No. It's that he gets to pose as the warrior president defending the Iranian people against the Western imperialists.

What if there is no Western imperialist? What if there is no United States intention? What if there is a withdrawal of U.S. forces from their borders? What if you take away this Ahmadinejad prop? I believe the best way to seek regime change in Iran is not to seek regime change. I think Obama gets this. And that's why in fact he is more dangerous to the current administration.

Finally, and this is just a small tactical suggestion: implement the plans of the Bush administration to open up an interests section in Tehran. This is an easy one. This is something Condoleezza Rice has spoken about. This is something that's in the works that may happen before the current administration leaves office.

If it doesn't, then the President-Elect should do it. It does what the previous speaker noted, it starts to normalize the process, that we start treating Iran like other countries, not all at once, not in big concessions; just in the normal process. It both reduces the tensions between the countries, opens up the tantalizing process of greater things to come, starts to give the Iranians the respect they feel they deserve, and starts giving us eyes and ears on the ground.

With those modest suggestions I will stop and wait for your questions. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

DR TRITA PARSİ: Thank you so much, Joe. With that we are opening up for questions. I'm going to use the prerogative of the chair and ask the first question.

If the Bush administration could make the decision to begin talks over Afghanistan, what is so terribly different now for the next administration to not only be able to do that, but also to be able to send the signal that I think Joe talked about, of a strategic intent - that the purpose of the conversation is not just for some tactical gains after which both countries return to the regular enmity, but actually show the intent that there is a desire for a more sustainable change in that relationship. Not necessarily a grand bargain as Ambassador Dobbins has pointed out, but something that truly is aimed at more than just tactical gains?

AMBASSADOR JAMES DOBBINS: Well, I think one thing that has changed for the worse is that whereas in the aftermath of 9/11 the Iranians and the United States were supporting the same

factions in Afghanistan, and were hostile to the same regime in Iraq, the situation is more complicated and less promising at the moment. The Iranians are providing some modest degrees of support to the Taliban and other insurgents in Afghanistan — not as much as our ally Pakistan — but still enough to make it a serious source of concern. And they are certainly aiding groups in Iraq that are also working against the kind of stability that we are trying to promote. So it's a steeper uphill climb this time than it would have been in 2001 or 2003.

DR. FARIDEH FARHI: There is no doubt that it is a steeper climb, and there is also the reality of the past five years that has created tremendous mistrust on both sides and in particular in relation to certain sectors of the Iranian political system. But I think the environment is also fraught with opportunities. I think it is very significant, for example, that important players in Iranian politics in the past couple of days have signaled that they have no problems with the status of forces agreement in Iraq. I think it's a wait-and-see attitude, and I think it's, as has been pointed out by others, suggesting a possibility that they are trying to see what the new administration will do; and therefore they are open to the possibility of the kind of strategic talks that Trita is talking about.

Last week, the speaker of the Parliament, Mr. Ali Larijani, after listening to listening to Mr. Obama saying that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapons program — and obviously that is something the Iranians don't like to hear, the language of nuclear weapons instead of nuclear energy program — Mr. Larijani essentially said, if Mr. Obama is going to talk in the same way as before, and not approach the issue strategically, there is absolutely no reason to have a conversation.

MR. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: It's much steeper now. If we had made a deal that was available to us in 2001, there wouldn't be an Iranian nuclear program to worry about now. If we had done it in 2003, there wouldn't be an Iranian nuclear program. If we had tried to do it in 2005, we'd be talking about a couple of dozen centrifuges. Even last year a few hundred centrifuges. Now we are looking at five to six thousand centrifuges spinning, working at about 80 percent capacity, produced nearly enough low enriched uranium that could be reprocessed into highly enriched uranium for a bomb. The chips on the Iranian side have gone up considerably during these years of missed opportunities, and failed policies.

BARRY SCHWEID, ASSOCIATED PRESS: First of all, would you stop at Afghanistan and Iraq and similar to what happened in 2001? And secondly, what is Ambassador Dobbins' reaction to the idea that Joe presented that President-Elect Obama should not rush into any conversations with the Iranians?

AMBASSADOR JAMES DOBBINS: I would be cautious about making proposals to the Iranians that I wasn't sure they were going to accept, which is a fairly standard diplomatic approach. I think simply dropping the barriers to communication allows one to then explore. There are a lot of issues on the agenda. Which are the ones that are at the top of your list? And what is it that you are trying to achieve? And what sort of pathway do you see towards addressing these different issues?

With that kind of information, maybe it's opening interest sections. Maybe it's the U.S. joining the five-party talks on the nuclear program. Maybe it's more formal and open collaboration on Afghanistan or Iraq. You know, in other words there's a variety of possibilities. But rather than negotiate with ourselves and then present them with the results, I would simply open the communications channels, listen to what they have to say, ask them some leading questions. Ideally as confidentially as possible, but not concealing the fact that you are talking to them. I would do that immediately, because it doesn't require any reciprocity on their side. You are not giving them anything. And then once you have a reasonable confidence that a particular proposal or a particular approach is likely to be reciprocated, I would then move forward. And I don't think I would try to game the Iranian political system too much. But I would want to have laid the groundwork so that if we propose a higher level meeting at the secretary of state level or something, or we have some other particular proposal that we are pretty sure they are going to accept it.

BARRY SCHWEID, ASSOCIATED PRESS: Could we see if Joe thinks that right?

MR. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Yes, I think that is very consistent with what I was saying. What you want to lead with is the areas where you have parallel interests. So we both have an interest in stabilizing Iraq. And including seeing the government stabilize under the leadership of the majority of the people of Iraq. We both have an interest in stabilizing Afghanistan, and in defeating or at least containing the Taliban. We both have an interest in defeating al-Qaeda. We both have an interest in restricting the drug trade that is coming out of Afghanistan that is a big problem for Iran. We both have an interest in seeking a solution to Middle East security overall and encouraging investment in the region overall. So there are many areas where you could have discussions that could be productive, that could give the pragmatists in the Iranian political structure some idea of the benefits that one gets by easing tensions with the United States. And then you are in a better position to engage directly in the nuclear talks. I also agree with Ambassador Dobbins that the U.S. would join the five-party talks. It's the direct one-on-one talks that I would delay for the time being.

AMBASSADOR LAINGEN: How do we not just have a unilateral conversation but make sure there is a sustainable multilateral conversations with the Iranians together with the other P5+1 members?

MR. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: We have seen the first step taken by having William Burns joins this multilateral discussion with the Iranians. It was just a one-shot affair, but we should now make that permanent, with the new State Department official at that level permanently joining these talks.

And number two, I think Ambassador Dobbins has sketched it out very well. You start having a series of meetings, privately, quietly, where you listen, where you jointly start setting the agenda, the bigger agenda, not just the nuclear talks. It's in that context that you can sort of decrease the tension around the nuclear issue and stop making that necessarily the centerpiece of

the U.S.-Iranian relationship because it is the most antagonistic one. It's the one where we have the most difference. And I would guess recognition of Israel. You want to be able to come back to those after you have established some bona fides with Iranians.

QUESTION FROM BBC: What are your thoughts of Hillary Clinton taking on the role of Secretary of State? How will that affect prospects of talks?

MR. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: In the summer of 2000, Condoleezza Rice wrote an excellent article in Foreign Affairs articulating the realist perspective that she would bring to the Bush administration. A few months later as national security adviser, she completely reversed that position and adopted the policy position of the president of the United States. I would expect that as secretary of state, whoever it is, Senator Kerry or Senator Clinton, that they would adopt the policy of the president of the United States, and use the formidable tools that they possess personally and politically to implement the president's agenda.

AMBASSADOR JAMES DOBBINS: Just one point there. I think that Mrs. Clinton's statement that she as president would obliterate Iran if they launched a nuclear attack on Israel was somehow portrayed as rather provocative and tough. In fact, what she apparently was saying was that she wasn't going to attack them before they had nuclear weapons; that she was going to rely on deterrence to prevent them from using nuclear weapons; and the deterrent would be that they'd be obliterated if they used them.

Now I'm not suggesting that that was a deeply thought-through response, and that that's in fact what she meant. But the fact is it's not a particularly provocative statement. It's exactly what we said with respect to the Soviet Union for 50 years: if they launched a nuclear attack against any of our allies, we would respond massively, and nuclearly.

DR. FARIDEH FARHI: The bottom line is that we are faced with a situation where Iran has faced a number of sanctions generated out of the United Nations process, and also a number of sanctions generated out of the activities of the United States, alongside its allies.

So the question is whether or not the Obama administration, as it sends its representative to this process, would be willing to engage in a kind of conversation that is different or would it essentially follow a similar path of stick and carrots that the Europeans followed at the American prodding.

And I would argue that if that kind of conversation continues, even without conditions, where the United States essentially goes in and tells Iran that we expect certain things from you at the end of this conversation, the American involvement in that process would not be a game changer. I think the Obama administration is faced with a choice on a process that has already begun, and has to make a decision on whether to continue the process along the same lines, or change the dynamics.

CONGRESSIONAL STAFFER: Do any of the panelists believe that Iran can have a positive impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conference?

MR. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: I would ask Trita. He wrote the book on this, and I think it was he who told me, I think you stated it more cleverly than this but, it's not that involving Iran in the peace process guarantees a successful outcome, but not involving them guarantees failure. You have to have Iran in this mix. Do you want to comment personally on that?

DR. TRITA PARSI: I'll be happy to. Thank you for the question. I think you are quite correct, Joe. If I could just add to that: I don't think it's necessarily what positive influence Iran would be able to bring. If you look at Iran's behavior over the past 30 years, it doesn't necessarily view what's happening in Israel and Palestine as very vital to its national interests. It certainly has some ideological aspirations that it seeks to protect. But the times in which Iran has actively acted against the peace process have been when the peace process has been coupled with a policy of isolating and containing Iran.

During the times in which either that combination was not pursued, such as during the Camp David II talks, or when the Iranians found themselves in a more comfortable situation and did not view the peace process as a threat to their position since they had managed to improve their relations with their Arab neighbors as well as with Europe, one saw a completely different Iranian profile – one that didn't seek to interfere or undermine the peace process.

That's part of the reason why I'm personally not terribly hopeful about approaches such as that in Annapolis, in which the only common denominator was not necessarily a conviction that peace between Israelis and Palestinians could be achieved, but rather, a willingness to show that Iran had to be isolated. With such approaches, we would be unwise to be surprised that Iran would use its asymmetric capabilities to undermine whatever the United States was pursuing. That is how Iran is relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and why you are hearing, slowly but surely, voices in Israel arguing that a U.S.-Iran dialogue would actually be better for Israel as well.

GARETH PORTER: The situation with Iran's nuclear weapons is the 800-pound gorilla in the room. Can someone comment on Obama's conversation about nuclear weapons? We can take two different positions. A) we can assume that we know that Iran has the intention of getting nuclear weapons, and we must stop them. Or B) we can assume that we don't know Iran's intentions. What are we gaining tactically in the negotiations by assuming that we know Iran's intentions?

MR. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Last year I wrote a study at the Center for American Progress called "Contain and Engage." And it was my strategy for how to deal with the Iranian nuclear program. You wanted to contain the Iran nuclear program, contain Iran's regional ambitions, by engaging them. And the premise of this is that we don't know Iran's intentions, and you often hear candidates or officials in office talk about the

Iranians' nuclear weapons program. The Iranians don't talk about it that way. They say they do not want nuclear weapons. We should hold them to that. My hypothesis is that the Iranian regime has not yet reached a consensus on whether they want nuclear weapons, but they have reached a consensus on pursuing the acquisition of technologies that could put them in a position to build nuclear weapons in the relatively near future should they decide to do so, and that's the essence of the problem. What they say is a peaceful program to enrich uranium for fuel rods involves facilities that could be easily and relatively quickly turned to enriching uranium for bombs.

They are the only country outside of the five nuclear powers, the nuclear weapon states, besides Japan, who has this kind of capability. We want to stop that capability. We want to stop it not just because we are afraid Iran is going to get nuclear weapons, but because of what their neighbors will do. We already see it happening. I have an article coming out in *Current History* in a few days about the nuclear arms race in the Middle East. It's not called an arms race. No other country admits that they are doing this for nuclear purpose. But we've had a dozen countries in the region suddenly declare an interest in nuclear

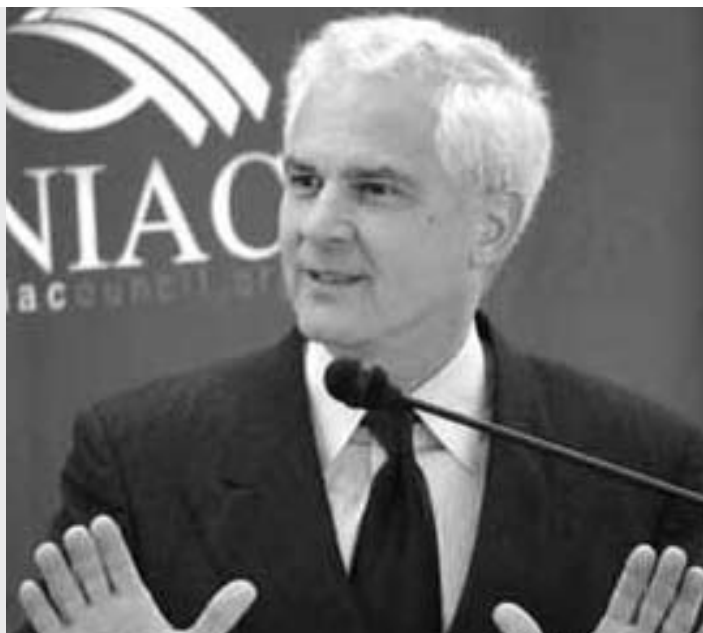
program that would prevent it from morphing into true weapons capability. The clock is ticking. We have to resolve this in the next four to five years or we won't be able to resolve it at all.

DR. TRITA PARSI: If I could just follow up on that. What would the United States lose or gain tactically by adopting the assumption that we don't know Iran's intentions?

MR. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Number one, you would gain the respect of the Iranian negotiators. You are not assuming that this is a program with evil intent. But you would also gain the sort of political high ground of being able to say, 'we understand that you do not desire a nuclear weapons program. What concerns us is what other administrations may decide after you. The capability of the system, what your neighbors' reaction is, that's our larger program.' It allows the Iranians to address this in a way that doesn't force them to admit to an intention that they have consistently denied.

DR. TRITA PARSI: Ambassador Dobbins, would you like to add to that?

"I would like it if they stopped enrichment altogether. I would like it if we could have a world that before we entered into negotiations, they would stop enriching. I don't think that deal is possible now. The nuclear horse has left the barn." -Joseph Cirincione, President, Ploughshares Foundation



power programs or nuclear research programs. I think this is not because of a sudden interest in global warming. It is about Iran. You have got to stop that dynamic. That is the proliferation dynamic you've got to stop. We have to find a way to contain the Iranian program.

I would like it if they stopped enrichment altogether. I would like it if we could have a world that before we entered into negotiations they would stop enriching. I don't think that deal is possible now. That nuclear horse has left the barn.

What we are now talking about is containing the program. A pause in the expansion of the program to allow a new Iranian relationship to develop within which sometime in the not-too-distant future we may be able to get a rollback of this program, a containment of this program, a multilateral solution to this

AMBASSADOR JAMES DOBBINS: I certainly don't think we should take our public posture beyond where the evidence compellingly leads us, and so I don't think we should be disingenuous and pretend that we accept assurances on their part that we in fact don't credit. But at the same time I don't think we should leap to conclusions that the intelligence in fact doesn't allow us to move to, and so I think I would basically agree with Joe about taking their protestations that they don't want a nuclear weapon as a starting point for the dialogue, and then questioning activity that seems incompatible with that is probably a better way of engaging them constructively than simply calling them liars.

MR. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Can I just add one small point to that? The position I've just articulated is the analysis that was presented in the National Intelligence Estimate on Iran, where

they say that Iran had a nuclear weapons program but appears to have abandoned that effort, and that they are not in a rush to develop a nuclear weapon. What that means is that Iran's decision on this is subject to the same cost-benefit analysis of most states, and that some combination of incentives and prohibitions could affect the judgment of the Iranian regime on this program.

MAHTAB FARID: I'd like to go back to Trita Parsi's comment on human rights issues. I'm concerned about my schoolmate, Esha Momeni who has been arrested in Iran. What should the next administration do to address the human rights in Iran, and will U.S. diplomats be able to take responsibility for U.S. citizens of Iranian descent since there is nothing like this happening now?

MR. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: The current regime in Iran is a murderous regime. This is a regime that kills dissidents in their beds, in foreign capitals. This is a regime that held one of my colleagues in the Woodrow Wilson Center in prison for five months. This is a regime with a deplorable human rights record. I did not address it because it is simply outside my expertise. I don't know what the correct response is. That doesn't mean I'm unaware of their despicable record.

DR. FARIDEH FARHI: On human rights, first, Esha Momeni is out, and hopefully she'll be on a plane back home. I think while it's very important to talk about the deplorable human rights record of the Iranian regime, it's also very important to take note of the fact of the kind of activities that someone like Dr. Esfandiari or many other academics were engaged in, doing research in Iran, going and coming back, was actually considered to be part of Track II dynamics under the Khatami Administration. This is why you had so many Iranian academics coming to Wilson Center to talk. And it is really a sad and unfortunate dynamic for the new administration in Iran to use the pretext of the \$75 million democracy fund to crack down on a policy that was promoted by the previous reformist administration. That is why so many Iranian-Americans were caught in these dynamics, because they assumed not only that their activities were legal, it was also something that the Iranian government approved. So a lot of us, including myself, who has also spent a little bit of time in jail, were caught in this antagonistic sudden turn that occurred in U.S.-Iran relations.

QUESTION: There are other groups promoting other strategic issues, for example there is an article in the Wall Street Journal about blocking petroleum product imports. I wanted to ask the panel and specifically Dr. Farhi about whether such efforts would be possible; and secondly, what would be the impact?

DR. FARIDEH FARHI: On the question of pressures, this argument about increasing both the pressures and incentives is based on the premise that there are elements within the Iranian government that are pragmatic enough that will convince the hardliners to give in if the pressure is hard enough. In a competitive political environment that is a no-no. It's almost as though within the context of American politics we would say that one political party is ready to appease the Iranians, while the other party is not. Which one is going to get elected? Obviously within the Iranian political environment, it is politically negative to take the position that one must give in to American pressure.

On the question of sanctions of gas exports, or gas imports in Iran, that is again another reflection of how people outside Iran simply don't understand what is going on in Iran. They really don't have the basics. The Iranian government, precisely because there have been talks of sanctions of gasoline imports, has begun a process that will protect itself against that kind of embargo. So in many ways people would argue that this kind of talk has actually strengthened the Ahmadinejad government, and in fact, any attempt, as Professor Dobbins pointed out, of trying to game the Iranian political system in such a way that would favor one side against the other will ultimately backfire, because people read in Iran. Any declaration that comes out of Washington is immediately available. This policy joint expert proposal has already been translated, and is on the websites in Iran. So people have a very clear understanding of the kind of discussions that are going on in Washington.

HOWARD LAFRANCHI: Talking more about human rights and the American approach, I'm wondering about these crucial elections coming up, and you mentioned earlier how the \$75 million Democracy Fund backfired. If you want an interim period, what should the approach to the Iranian people be under the next administration?

DR. FARIDEH FARHI: I think United States should promote any kind of people-to-people relationship that is possible. Give visas for scholars to come, whether or not the Iranian government doesn't let them come, or confiscates their passports is a different issue. The United States should also be very clear that it does not condone, and in fact, totally rejects the kind of human rights abuses that the Iranian government engages in. The Iranian government has invited seven or eight American university presidents to visit Iran and various universities in Iran. I think it would be a great idea if the United States would extend an invitation to several important Iranian universities and ask them to come.



So there are a lot of things that can be done, which the United States has not done in the past. I think the problematic relationship is generated out of the fact that the question of democracy in Iran and promotion of regime change have become connected in Iran, and has created problems. That kind of an approach needs to be abandoned. It has backfired. Whether or not it was a good idea is irrelevant. It has backfired, and the Iranian government has used it very effectively not only to attack dissidents, not only to attack college professors, but also to undermine the reformists for being appeasers and servants of the American government. And it has been a very effective political strategy inside the country.

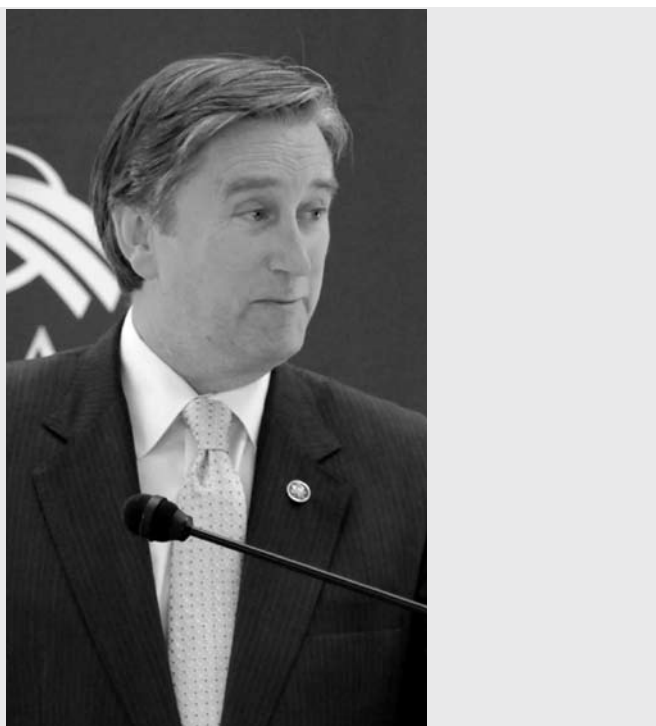
DR. TRITA PARSI: Thank you so much. With that, please join me in thanking our panelists for an excellent discussion.

(Applause)

ADDRESS BY CHAIRMAN JOHN TIERNEY (D-MA)

DR. TRITA PARSI: Greetings. We are delighted to have Chairman John Tierney's with us today to share his views on how to handle the Iranian issue. Having represented Massachusetts's Sixth District for seven terms, Chairman John Tierney is recognized by all camps as an effective legislator fighting for America's working families.

He has not only been an active leader on education and labor issues, but also on national security through his seat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and in his capacity as the Chairman of the National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Earlier this year, Chairman Tierney held a series of hearings on U.S.-Iran relations, bringing a wide range of views and expertise to Congress to advise on how to best address the many challenges Iran poses.



Chairman, we are delighted to have you join us today and we thank you for your leadership.

(Applause)

CHAIRMAN JOHN TIERNEY: Thank you, Trita and all of the other event organizers, for inviting me here today.

It's a privilege to be a part of this event and to share the podium with my esteemed colleagues from the Senate as well as some of the foremost experts on these issues. In particular, it's good to see Ambassador Jim Dobbins and Joe Cirincione, both of whom provided invaluable testimony before the National Security Oversight Subcommittee when we conducted a series of hearings on Iran as well as a series on U.S. missile defense efforts.

I am hopeful that today marks the dawning of a new day for the people of the United States and the people of Iran. For too long, the vision of what could lie ahead in improved relations and cooperation between our two countries and peoples has been obscured by a lack of understanding of each other's government and people, as well as a lack of foresight and a realistic and pragmatic strategy.

The outgoing administration's approach has not worked. Gone are the days of bellicose statements like "Axis of Evil," to be replaced, I hope, by a more thoughtful, deliberate approach. We need a new plan, and now is the time to formulate and implement that plan.

That's why I am pleased to be a part of this conference today. The "Joint Experts' Statement on Iran," in particular, is a very serious effort by an esteemed group of hard-nosed experts who understand Iran, its government, and its people. These experts are people like Ambassador Dobbins who have had direct experience in past negotiations with Iranian counterparts and people who, in my opinion, should be listened to.

From a U.S. perspective, one of the key features of this Experts' Statement is the section aimed at rooting out fundamental misconceptions about Iran. I think this effort is vitally important. In fact, the Subcommittee held a congressional hearing specifically on the topic of identifying who the Iranian people really are, and how their government works.

Myth #1 in the Experts' Statement is that President Ahmadinejad calls the shots on Iran's nuclear and foreign policy. As the statement stresses, and I quote, "the ultimate decision-maker is Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the commander-in-chief of Iran's forces." The statement also concludes, "Despite his frequently hostile rhetoric aimed at Israel and the West, Khamenei's track record reveals a cautious decision-maker who acts after consulting advisors holding a range of views, including views sharply critical of Ahmadinejad." If this Experts' Statement does nothing else, it would be huge service if the cited myths were finally vanquished.

If policymakers – and the American people more generally – are going to be making sound, pragmatic decisions about how the U.S. should interact with Iran, its various leaders and centers of power, and the Iranian people, we first have to have an accurate picture and understanding of what's truly going on inside the country.

The Experts' Statement also puts forward five key recommendations on the way forward. Now is the time, I believe, to have a robust debate about alternate policy plans toward Iran, and to fully compare the pros, cons, opportunities, and risks associated with each. Now is the time to lay out specific recommendations and suggestions; to debate those options; and to make decisions.

When trying to figure out the best path forward, it's critical to focus not only on the immense challenges we currently face with respect to Iran – for example, its nuclear activities and its funding of Hamas and Hezbollah – it's also vital to debate and explore what the U.S. has to gain from improved relations with Iran.

One only needs to look on a map to see the strategic importance of Iran, with Iraq on one side and Afghanistan on the other. But it doesn't end there – improved U.S.-Iranian relations will pay dividends for us in Lebanon, Israel, Pakistan, and numerous other places of top importance to U.S. national security interests. Iran also has the world's second largest proven reserves of conventional crude oil.

Let's assume for a moment that we all agree that a new direction for U.S. policy toward Iran is needed, and that an approach more focused on diplomacy and negotiations makes sense. The next step is to ask ourselves whether the time is ripe to make overtures in this direction.

I would argue that many factors lead us to the conclusion that now is indeed the right time for a shift in strategy, in part, because the United States currently has more leverage with respect to Iran than we've had in several years. There are three main reasons.

First, oil is currently selling in the \$50 a barrel range, and not in the \$140 dollar a barrel range as it was last July. This impacts not only the economic situation in Iran itself, but also impacts the potential actions and attitudes of other countries around the world, including Russia and China. Second, Iraq and the Afghanistan and Pakistan regions remain volatile, and both Iran and the United States have an interest in fostering stability in both areas.

Third, we have a new Administration coming to power that I hope will be able to repair and rebuild the United States' moral authority and our leadership capacity in the world. These factors, to me, signify now would be an inviting time to try to meaningfully engage. The million dollar question then is: will a new approach of diplomacy and negotiation work?

My first response is to ask: what has the outgoing Administration's approach gotten us? I would argue very little, and in many ways, it has been counterproductive. So what are the signs that an alternate approach – one focused first and foremost on diplomacy and negotiation – might work?

I agree with those who say that while no approach is risk-free and there are no certainties in this complicated world of ours, Iran has demonstrated its desire in the not so distant past to play a useful regional role. Tactical cooperation by Iran in the lead-up and early days of the post-September 11th Afghanistan effort was fundamentally positive, and there were signs that Iran hoped this cooperation would lead to a genuine strategic opening.

The subcommittee heard fascinating testimony from Ambassador Dobbins, Hillary Mann Leverett, and others who were directly involved in those efforts on behalf of the United States. I would encourage everyone to read their testimony and to fully explore the history of that time period for hints about what might be possible today. Just as it did then, Iran currently has a vested interest in resolving regional issues that directly impact its stability and security, including refugee flows, cross-border smuggling and crime, as well as terrorism.

As I noted earlier, there is ample evidence and intelligence that Iranian leadership – especially the leadership that counts in Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei – would take a realistic and pragmatic approach to challenges. Let's remember that our most recent National Intelligence Estimate on Iran, dated November 2007, concluded that, "Tehran's decisions are guided by a cost-benefit approach."

Flynt Leverett put it this way, "the Islamic Republic has for many years shown itself capable of acting in instrumentally rational ways to define and advance its interests." The Expert's Statement concluded, "[t]he recent history of Iran makes crystal clear that national self-preservation and regional influence – not some quest for martyrdom in the service of Islam – is Iran's main foreign policy goal," and points to specific instances in Iran's recent history to buttress this statement.

It would be useful to keep this assessment in mind when judging which way forward with respect to U.S. policy toward Iran. On that front, the Experts' Statement notes, "the United States and Iran support the same government in Iraq and face common enemies (the Taliban and al-Qaeda) in Afghanistan." If Iran shares these interests with the United States and Iran has acted in a cost-benefit approach in the past, there would appear to be present opportunities for increased strategic and tactical cooperation. This is why the Experts' Statement stresses that it's so important to, "allow Iran a place at the

“Talking directly to a foreign government in no way signals approval of the government, its policies or its actions.”

-Chairman John Tierney (D-MA)



table – alongside other key states – in shaping the future of Iraq, Afghanistan and the region.”

It’s also no secret that Iran’s economy is struggling considerably, and this is only exacerbated by the current relatively lower price of oil. I have to believe that the prospect of improved economic relations would be a powerful motivator from the Iranian side, especially as their country’s leadership looks at a population with a median age of 26 years.

History also gives us plentiful examples of how pragmatic, hard-nosed diplomacy has been effective in solving seemingly intractable problems; for example, helping to end the Cold War and stopping Libya’s nuclear ambitions. This direct-engagement approach has even led to some progress with North Korea, a country that, unlike Iran, already boasts a nuclear weapon. Not all of these issues have been fully resolved, and there are certainly fits and starts, but real and tangible progress has been made.

If negotiations and diplomacy with Iran weren’t to immediately pay off, there still exist real benefits to this approach, especially when considering the long-term. Polling in Iran has shown quite high approval ratings for the United States, especially when compared with the polling done in other countries in the region, including many current U.S. allies. Despite years of sanctions and all that has come before, the average Iranian citizen has a reserve of good will toward America that we can and must capitalize on.

In fact, in a poll last year 68 percent of Iranians favored normal relations and trade with the United States. A new strategic approach by the United States that recognizes and leverages these positive feelings could seemingly be a powerful tool and in the long-term interests of the U.S. relationship with the Iranian people. We need to heed the words of Defense Secretary Gates and others who stress the need to bolster our “smart power” institutions and abilities, and we need to take into account how various policy alternatives will impact the hearts and minds of Iranians.

We must remember that – in the long run – our relationship with the Iranian people is more important than any current relationship with any specific current Iranian leader. It should also be stressed that trying negotiation and diplomacy does not take other policy alternatives off the table. Sanctions are not mutually exclusive to talks and are always available ultimately if need be. That said, unilateral sanctions have shown themselves to be less than successful, especially when employed in the globalized world in which we find ourselves. It’s also important to stress, as the Experts’ Statement puts it: “Long-standing diplomatic practice makes clear that talking directly to a foreign government in no way signals approval of the government, its policies or its actions.”

Given all this, what is the best way for the new Administration to proceed? None of us has all the answers, and we can learn from experts like those you have at this conference about the specifics for what an approach stressing diplomacy and negotiations would look like. In particular, there’s the ongoing debate about whether a so-called “grand bargain” approach as espoused by Flynt Leverett, among others, makes the most sense or whether we should go forward in a more incremental manner. Flynt’s recent article on the subject presents a strong argument that dissenters must, I believe, address honestly.

I will say, though, that the more people-to-people exchanges we have with Iranians the better. We need to welcome Iranian students and to encourage exchanges of artists and scientists and others. Moreover, I think that Congress-to-Parliament dialogues can also play a helpful role, as they have with other countries and in other contexts.

It is also vitally important to be clear-eyed that our nonproliferation interests with respect to Iran are critical, not only for what happens in Iran but how Iran’s actions impact nonproliferation efforts throughout the Middle East and throughout the rest of the world.



“Well, if you make their stopping enriching uranium as a precondition to the talks, what is there left to talk about?” -Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA)

The Experts’ Statement recommends the following approach, “the United States should take an active leadership role in ongoing multilateral talks to resolve the nuclear impasse in the context of wide-ranging dialogue with Iran. Negotiators would give the nuclear talks a reasonable deadline, and retain the threat of tougher sanctions if negotiations fail. They should also, however, offer the credible prospect of security assurances and specific, tangible benefits such as the easing of U.S. sanctions in response to positive policy shifts in Iran.”

In negotiations, you can’t just get something for nothing. If we are to be serious, the U.S. must clarify its primary intentions to seek changed Iranian policies through negotiations, not changed borders or governments through military force. In addition to regional security interests, what Iran must be willing to honestly discuss has been well-rehearsed – from the nuclear issue, to its relationship with Hamas and Hezbollah, to its positions on Israeli-Palestinian matters.

Finally, I want to stress that one of the great strengths of our country is that we’re made up of peoples and cultures from all over the world. The fact that we have so many talented Iranian-Americans as a vital part of the fabric of our country and our communities is an incredible strength. And this conference is the perfect example of leadership by this community.

The January 20th inauguration of President Obama, followed by the June 2009 elections in Iran, present a golden opportunity for our two countries and our two peoples to improve our bilateral relations. I firmly believe that such an approach is in both of our interests. Greater cooperation and improved relations can help promote regional stability, help provide better security for both our peoples, improve economic conditions for everyone involved, preserve reliable energy supplies, help achieve vital non-proliferation goals, and lead to better lives for the children in both our countries.

Thank you again for having me here today and for listening.

(Applause)

DR. TRITA PARSI: Thank you all so much. Thank you, Chairman.

ADDRESS BY SENATOR ARLEN SPECTER (R-PA)

DR. TRITA PARSI: Welcome back. We have with us today none other than Senator Arlen Specter. Having served the state of Pennsylvania since 1980, Senator Arlen Specter is one our nation’s best known and most respected lawmakers.

Senator Specter’s five terms have made him the longest-serving U.S. Senator in Pennsylvania’s history. A voice of reason, his independence and balance have won endorsements from the AFL-CIO and high marks from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the Americans for Tax Reform.

Time listed him among the 10 best Senators in 2006. *Knowlegis* rated him the second most powerful Senator in 2006 behind only Majority Leader Bill Frist. A November 11, 2007, Philadelphia Inquirer editorial stated: “Sen. Arlen Specter has more clout than some sovereign nations.”

And Senator Specter has been a voice of reason and dialogue and against belligerency and saber rattling on Iran for more than 10 years. Though he today is joined by many in his call for diplomacy, he remained true to that principle in the past even when he was joined by none.

His leadership on this issue is truly remarkable. Senator – we are most honored to have you join us today.

SENATOR ARLEN SPECTER: When you recite all of those alleged accolades, you left out my most important attribute. And that is, my office is right down the hall on the 7th floor here, so I’m an easy speaker to land.

(Laughter)

When you talk about the views of the President-Elect on a dialogue with Iran, just remember that was my point of view long before he became a United States Senator, let alone the President-Elect. I have long believed that dialogue is indispensable if the problems of the world are to be solved. To me it doesn't seem like a very complicated proposition.

You start off with a few fundamentals, and that is each nation has very important national interests. And that applies to Iran and that applies to the United States, and that applies to all of the nations of the world. And Iran is in a very key location in a very difficult neighborhood: adjacent to the problems of the Middle East with the difficulties that Israel has faced, the relationship with Syria and the perspective negotiations there, and Hezbollah and Hamas, the relationship between Syria and Iran, and the grave concern about Iran developing a nuclear weapon. And there is a view in many, if not most, parts of the world about the unacceptability of Iran having a nuclear weapon. Well, that's something that we're concerned about in North Korea. But they've had a nuclear weapon for some time.

And finally we had a breakthrough with North Korea in 1993, and then North Korea went back to its old ways. And finally when President Bush authorized Secretary of State Rice to engage bilateral discussions with North Korea in addition to the multi-lateral talks which involved China, Japan, South Korea and other nations, we were able to work through on that. And we find that we're able to bring Moammar Qaddafi and Libya into the family of nations, that's quite an accomplishment.

We've been concerned for decades about the Iranian sponsorship of terrorism. But if you wanted to pick out the world's worst terrorist, it would be Moammar Qaddafi. If you wanted to have a discussion about who was the greatest hitter of baseball of all time, it would take a lot of discussion whether it's Williams or Musial or Ryan Howard, or who it is. But if you wanted to pick out the world's worst terrorist, it's Qaddafi. He blew up Pan Am 103, bombed the Berlin discotheque, killed Americans. And then Qaddafi came back into the family of nations and made reparations. And now he's received in the capitals of the world.

I went to see him the summer before last. He's an interesting guy to visit - be prepared for some tough helicopter rides in the desert. He lives in the center of the desert in Libya. He lives in a tent. And he greets his visitors with plastic chairs. But he's a person with whom we have dealt.

And I believe that diplomacy has to be explored with Iran as well. And I have confronted this Administration with it head on. When Secretary of State Rice came to talk before the Appropriations Committee I said 'if you're going to have negotiations with someone, how can you have the objective of the negotiations as a precondition?' What we want to do is to persuade Iran to stop enriching uranium - well, that's the objective. Well, if you make their stopping enriching uranium as a precondition to the talks, what is there left to talk about?

And a few weeks ago Secretary of Defense Gates was in, and it was a slightly different focus, but relevant. And I asked him the same question. And I haven't yet received any answer.

It's difficult to talk to Iranian officials because of the barriers which exist between our two countries. But the Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations is accessible. And I've gotten to know the last three Iranian Ambassadors to the U.N, and they're pre-eminently reasonable men, I have found.

For several years I've tried to organize a parliamentary exchange with members of the Senate and House meeting with members of the Iranian Parliament. It seemed to me that that was a good place to start. And toward that end, I talked to Tom Lantos who recently passed away, but had been Chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, I discussed with Senator Biden — now Vice President-Elect Biden — and with Dick Lugar, Chuck Hagel, and with others. And at one time we had a tentative arrangement undertaken. And then relations between the two countries flared up and it was abandoned.

The Speaker of the Iranian Parliament was in New York a few years back, and I made arrangements to meet him in the hallway. I conduct some of my most important meetings in hallways, as a matter of fact. Around here when the bells ring, who knows where you are? You might be addressing somebody on the 9th floor.

And you don't have any advance notice and you're rushing down the halls conducting business and transacting discussions because there is so little time. But I met the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament. It wasn't a long conversation, but it was a meeting. I made an effort.

The Speaker of the Iranian Parliament was in Geneva in early October. And I was scheduled to be in Altoona on that particular day. But I decided it would be more important to go to Geneva to



meet the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament than to go to Altoona. Probably was a bad decision, but that's the one I made. And I was all set to go and then the word came back that the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament wanted to meet with the Speaker of the American Parliament and didn't want to meet with a Senator. Well, okay, I can understand protocol. I'm not offended. It was too late to reinstate my trip to Altoona, so I had a free weekend.

But I'm looking forward to what President-Elect Obama has to say.

I applaud you for having this meeting. I think it is great that the National Iranian American Council is having this session. I think there are great opportunities. And the President-Elect has been very explicit on what he's had to say, that he welcomes dialogue. And I do, too.

Thank you all very much.

QUESTION: You have been an advocate of U.S.-Iranian relations for many years now. But where do we exactly begin? Who do we talk to? Do we start at a lower level? Because there's been some low level talks in the past probably four years about Iraq and Afghanistan. But where do we exactly begin?

SENATOR ARLEN SPECTER: Well, there have been many talks. You say 'where do we start?' is the question. There have been many lower level talks. There have been discussions about Iraq where Iran and U.S. officials have conferred.

I believe that inter-parliamentary exchange is a good place to start, and that's why I worked on it. I talked to President Bush about it and encouraged President Bush to have bilateral talks with Iran, and he was not ready to do that. I told him about my idea to have parliamentary talks. He analogized that to people-to-people talks. It's good to have Iranians and U.S. citizens talk to one another. I don't think that's really quite the target for parliamentarians to talk, but parliamentarians are not as formalistic as executives - the Iranian President or the United States President. So I think that is a good place to start.

Also, members of the Senate have a lot more independence than Executive Branch officials. So we can speak a little more freely without having the binding effect that somebody representing the Executive Branch would. And that would be preliminary. But I believe you will find the new President following through on what he has said.

Listen, we're ready, willing and able. And I think it's going to happen.

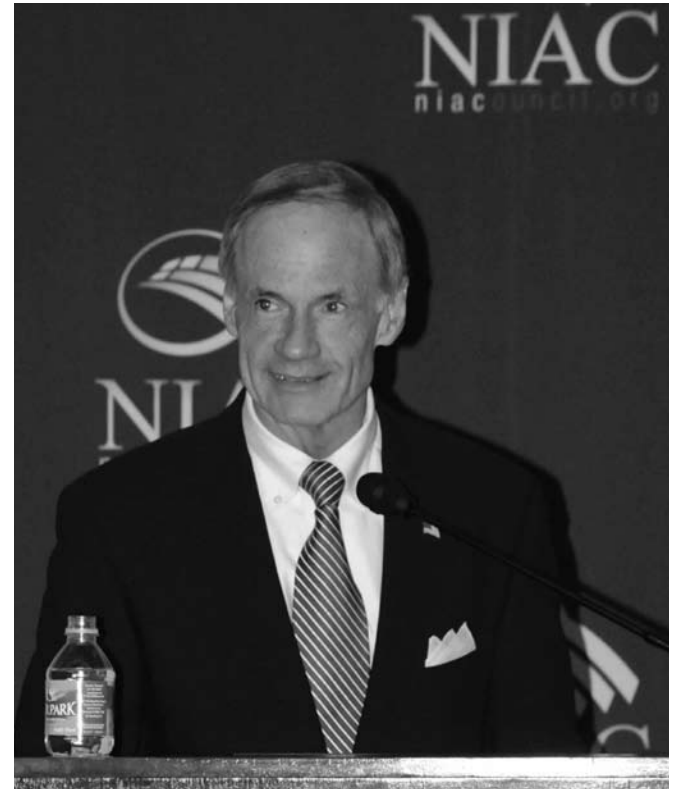
Thank you all very much.

DR. TRITA PARSI: Thank you so much, Senator.

(Applause)

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY SENATOR THOMAS CARPER (D-DE)

DR. TRITA PARSI: As the final speaker and the keynote address of this conference, we are delighted to have Senator Thomas Carper here with us. A veteran of the Vietnam War, Senator Carper has a long, distinguished career of public service. He was first elected in 1976 to the first of three terms as Delaware's state treasurer. In 1982, he was elected



to represent Delaware in the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1993, he was elected the 78th governor of Delaware and served two terms in that role. On Jan. 3, 2001, Tom Carper became Delaware's junior senator.

He serves as chairman of three subcommittees, including Homeland Security's Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security Subcommittee.

In that capacity, Chairman Carper held hearings earlier this year seeking to expand the range of options in regards to the stand-off with Iran. He is considered a strong voice of reason and bi-partisanship on issues of national security in general. And on Iran in particular, his leadership has helped push the debate forward and out of the impasse of the last few years.

We are privileged to have you here with us and eager to listen to your remarks.

SENATOR THOMAS CARPER: I would like to thank the National Iranian American Council, particularly its president, Dr. Trita Parsi, for the opportunity to speak to this distinguished crowd today.

I also want to acknowledge the presence of two courageous Americans here today: Ambassador Bruce Laingen, the former Charge d'affaires at our Embassy in Tehran, and Ambassador John Limbert, the former Political Officer there. They were two of the 52 Americans taken captive when Iranian militants seized the United States Embassy in Tehran in November 1979. They were held hostage for 444 days in Iran before being released. Thank you very much for your outstanding and brave service to our country.

I am also honored to be in the good company of Ambassador James Dobbins, who successfully recruited Iran to play an important, constructive role in the Bonn Conference to stabilize Afghanistan in 2001; Professor Farhi, one of the best analysts of Iran in the United States; Joseph Cirincione, a prominent, non-proliferation expert; and my friends Congressman John Tierney and Senator Arlen Specter. If now is a time for thoughtful, creative and courageous ideas on how our 44th president should approach Iran, their voices should figure prominently in this discussion.

It has often been said that one of the greatest challenges for a U.S. president is separating the urgent from the important. When President-Elect Barack Obama and Vice President-Elect Joe Biden enter the White House on January 20th, their inboxes will be full of both.

The Obama-Biden administration will face pressing global and domestic issues: Political instability in Iraq. The need to devise a fresh strategy in Afghanistan, re-tool U.S. policy towards Pakistan, and address prospects for a Middle East peace agreement.

They will face the challenge of global climate change, the need for nuclear arms reductions, and a new energy policy, not to mention the economic, policy, and security challenges posed by a nationalistic Russia, North Korea, a rising China, and India.

They will also face enormous domestic challenges, such as a crumbling U.S. economy facing recession, the hemorrhaging of home foreclosures, a broken healthcare system, and soaring federal deficits.

The list is long. Needless to say, the new president will have many sobering choices to make – choices of great consequence that require visionary leadership and thinking outside the box.

One choice is clear: We cannot afford to ignore the Middle East, where “the dangerous meets the most intractable of America’s strategic challenges.” In my view, there are few more urgent and complex challenges facing the new administration than Iran.

The Iranian President has denied multiple times that the Holocaust ever occurred and has threatened, time and again, to wipe Israel off the map. And, last Wednesday, Iran successfully test-fired a new generation of long range surface-to-surface missiles that could easily strike Israel and even hit

as far as southeastern Europe. It is easily understandable why Israel perceives Iran as an existential threat.

Iran is considered the world’s most active state sponsor of terrorism. We know Iran is the force behind Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, as well as militant Shia elements in Iraq. In his Senate testimony last April, General David Petraeus – the former top U.S. Commander in Iraq – said Iranian armed militias are the biggest threat to stability in Iraq. Furthermore, press reports have suggested that certain elements in Iran may be shipping arms to the Taliban, which is now stronger than ever in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It goes without saying that a nuclear weapon makes Iran an even more formidable threat, posing grave and unacceptable threats both to Israel and the United States as well as to Iran’s neighbors. As my long-time friend and our new Vice President-Elect Joe Biden said this summer, “Iran’s acquisition of a nuclear weapon would dramatically destabilize an already unstable region and probably fuel a nuclear arms race in the region. It is profoundly in our interest to prevent that from happening.” I could not agree more.

It is worth pausing to remember that when President George W. Bush came to office in January 2001, Iran was not a nuclear power state. When President Bush leaves office in 63 days, Iran will be much closer to acquiring the capacity either to assemble nuclear weapons or build a break-out capability. For this reason alone, it is increasingly clear that current policies are not preventing a nuclear Iran.

Although the December 2007 National Intelligence Estimate stated that Iran had stopped its nuclear weapons development program in the fall of 2003, it also importantly affirmed Iran’s continued enrichment of uranium and its simultaneous pursuit of ballistic missile delivery capabilities. Given that the production of fissile material is the most challenging aspect of the process of building a nuclear weapon, Iran’s continued enrichment of uranium is cause for real, immediate concern and warrants continued action by the U.S. and the international community. As former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns has said “The straightest avenue to nuclear weapons capability is not weaponization” but “enrichment and reprocessing.”

Add to this the Iranian President’s April announcement that Iran’s scientists and experts have started to install 6,000 new centrifuges at the Natanz uranium enrichment facility. These are in addition to the 3,300 centrifuges that the Director of the International Atomic Energy Agency – Mohammed El Baradei – has stated are already operating there.

Furthermore, Iran has indicated it will move toward large-scale uranium enrichment that will ultimately involve 54,000 centrifuges.

Unfortunately, last week’s Paris talks by the permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany, and the European Union did not reach agreement on further steps to pressure Iran to halt uranium enrichment at its facility in Natanz.



“It is increasingly clear that current policies are not preventing a nuclear Iran.” -Senator Thomas Carper (D-DE)

Regardless of whether we accept the Israeli intelligence estimate that Iran is expected to produce enough fuel for a nuclear weapon before the end of 2009, or the American one – that Iran will most likely get there within several years – the new administration must focus its energies carefully and quickly.

Last April, I held a hearing on Iran as chairman of the subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security, part of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. Our hearing examined what the United States and its allies must do to develop a coherent, long-term Iran strategy. Specifically, we discussed the range of different options our nation might employ to alter Iran’s behavior before it develops a nuclear weapon.

The new administration has three main options – continue the status quo, engage, or use military force. I have concluded – as has President-Elect Obama and Vice President-Elect Biden – that it is time for the United States to engage, by pursuing a robust and aggressive diplomacy, including direct, comprehensive talks with the Iranians that address their nuclear program and support of terrorism, among other issues. At our hearing, Dennis Ross, a former top Mideast envoy for Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, summed up why the United States must adopt direct diplomacy without conditions: He said: “you don’t want to be left with only two choices – war or living with an Iranian bomb.”

It must be said that in order to defend our security and our close ally Israel, military strikes against Iranian nuclear sites should remain on the table. The threat Israel fears is real and must be taken seriously. However, a number of policymakers believe, and I concur, that military force would be ill-advised. First, any strike would be difficult to execute as there is little known about exactly where the Iranian facilities are located. Second, U.S. or Israeli military strikes would likely rally a mostly pro-American population around the highly unpopular

government of President Ahmadinejad. Third, they would surely prompt widespread Iranian retaliation throughout the region, particularly in Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, Syria, and Iraq. Finally, any kind of unilateral military action – particularly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq – would lack the necessary international support.

To its credit, the Bush Administration has shifted rather significantly in recent years from rhetoric centered on regime change to a more pragmatic approach characterized by multilateral talks with the other permanent members of the UN Security Council.

As part of this diplomacy, in 2006, the United States offered a package of incentives, with the stated objective that should Iran suspend its enrichment-related and proliferation-sensitive activities, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would meet directly with her Iranian counterpart.

But two years of inadequate diplomatic efforts and five UN Security Council Resolutions have not forced Iran to suspend its enrichment-related and reprocessing activities. Some experts believe this trajectory has worked and could still work if the United States achieves greater Russian and Chinese cooperation. Many others believe that no amount of diplomacy will prevent a nuclear Iran from emerging. In fact, some now assume a nuclear Iran as their starting point for how we should approach Iran.

I am not of that mindset and believe we must continue efforts to prevent a nuclear Iran. I believe we can increase our chances of avoiding the terrible outcomes of war or a nuclear Iran by joining our European, Chinese, and Russian allies (the P5+1) in developing an effective, long-term strategy of tough diplomacy towards Iran. The way to stop or at least mitigate Iran’s enrichment activities is to present Iran with an enhanced set of carrots and sticks in order to change its “cost-benefit analysis.” As Vice President-Elect Biden has said, and again, I agree, “the time has come for us to strike a new

bargain with our ‘P5+1’ partners. The net effect of demanding preconditions that Iran rejects is this: We get no results and Iran gets closer to the bomb.”

To that end, I leave you with several thought-provoking questions that must be thoughtfully considered as the new administration develops its policies – hopefully in a bipartisan manner – on Iran:

One: Would the Iranians accept a United States offer to talk without preconditions? Realistically, what would direct talks with the Iranians accomplish? How should those talks be structured? Who in Iran should American diplomats talk to? And, when should we talk to Tehran?

Two: As *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman astutely points out, “when you have leverage, talk... when you don’t have leverage, get some.” Does the United States have any leverage with Iran? If the answer is no, how do we develop leverage?

Three: As a way of developing leverage with Iran, what other economic, political, and security incentives should the Obama Administration consider offering? For example, should President-Elect Obama first focus on smaller, confidence-building measures, such as cooperation on Afghanistan, where both the United States and Iran have overlapping interests? Should the new administration send a signal that the United States is not interested in regime change, or offer Tehran security guarantees if it halts its uranium enrichment? At the very least, should the United States look for ways outside government – as Secretary of Defense Gates suggested recently – “to open up the channels and get more of a flow of people back and forth?”

Four: In addition to offering incentives, we must also continue applying even more pressure to the struggling Iranian economy. Along with Secretary Gates, and President-

Elect Obama and Vice-President-Elect Biden, I believe in progressively ratcheting up sanctions. Sanctions provide leverage for negotiations. We may have more diplomatic leverage now, given the extreme drop in oil prices. The lower they go, the better our chances may be of persuading Iran to halt its nuclear efforts.

Five: And what of Israel? Will Israel preemptively attack certain Iranian nuclear sites? Within what time period? Israeli elections, scheduled for February 2009 as well as a volatile presidential election scheduled in Iran for June of next year, will certainly influence policy calculations between now and then.

Finally: How do we prepare for the possibility that our best efforts might not persuade Iran’s leaders stop its pursuit of nuclear weapons? Sometimes even our best efforts do not work. That may be the case with Iran.

But, I strongly believe that before we reach that conclusion, we must give serious diplomacy our very best try. Thank you.

(Applause)

DR. TRITA PARSI: Our conference is coming to its end. I want to make sure that I thank once more Senator Carper for sponsoring the conference and giving the keynote address, as well as our other sponsors, the Ploughshares Fund, the Pluralism Fund, the Kennedy Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

Thank you so much. We look forward to seeing you at our next conference. Thank you.



Appendix

Joint Experts' Statement on Iran

Among the many challenges that will greet President-Elect Obama when he takes office, there are few, if any, more urgent and complex than the question of Iran. There are also few issues more clouded by myths and misconceptions. In this Joint Experts' Statement on Iran, a group of top scholars, experts and diplomats – with years of experience studying and dealing with Iran – have come together to clear away some of the myths that have driven the failed policies of the past and to outline a factually-grounded, five-step strategy for dealing successfully with Iran in the future.

Despite recent glimmers of diplomacy, the United States and Iran remain locked in a cycle of threats and defiance that destabilizes the Middle East and weakens U.S. national security.

Today, Iran and the United States are unable to coordinate campaigns against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, their common enemies. Iran is either withholding help or acting to thwart U.S. interests in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Gaza. Within Iran, a looming sense of external threat has empowered hard-liners and given them both motive and pretext to curb civil liberties and further restrict democracy. On the nuclear front, Iran continues to enrich uranium in spite of binding U.N. resolutions, backed by economic sanctions, calling for it to suspend enrichment.

U.S. efforts to manage Iran through isolation, threats and sanctions have been tried intermittently for more than two decades. In that time they have not solved any major problem in U.S.-Iran relations, and have made most of them worse. Faced with the manifest failure of past efforts to isolate or economically coerce Iran, some now advocate escalation of sanctions or even military attack. But dispassionate analysis shows that an attack would almost certainly backfire, wasting lives, fomenting extremism and damaging the long-term security interests of both the U.S. and Israel. And long experience has shown that prospects for successfully coercing Iran through achievable economic sanctions are remote at best.

Fortunately, we are not forced to choose between a coercive strategy that has clearly failed and a military option that has very little chance of success.

There is another way, one far more likely to succeed: Open the door to direct, unconditional and comprehensive negotiations at the senior diplomatic level where personal contacts can be developed, intention tested, and possibilities explored on both sides. Adopt policies to facilitate unofficial contacts between scholars, professionals, religious leaders, lawmakers and ordinary citizens. Paradoxical as it may seem amid all the heated media rhetoric, sustained engagement is far more likely to strengthen United States national security at this stage than either escalation to war or continued efforts to threaten, intimidate or coerce Iran.

Enclosed are five key steps the United States should take to implement an effective diplomatic strategy with Iran:

1. **Replace calls for regime change with a long-term strategy.** Threats are not cowing Iran and the current regime in Tehran is not in imminent peril. But few leaders will negotiate in good faith with a government they think is trying to subvert them, and that perception may well be the single greatest barrier under U.S. control to meaningful dialogue with Iran. The United States needs to stop the provocations and take a long-term view with this regime, as it did with the Soviet Union and China. We might begin by facilitating broad-ranging people-to-people contacts, opening a U.S. interest section in Tehran, and promoting cultural exchanges.
2. **Support human rights through effective, international means.** While the United States is rightly concerned with Iran's worsening record of human rights violations, the best way to address that concern is through supporting recognized international efforts. Iranian human rights and democracy advocates confirm that American political interference masquerading as "democracy promotion" is harming, not helping, the cause of democracy in Iran.
3. **Allow Iran a place at the table – alongside other key states – in shaping the future of Iraq, Afghanistan and the region.** This was the recommendation of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group with regard to Iraq. It may be counter-intuitive in today's political climate – but it is sound policy. Iran has a long-term interest in the

stability of its neighbors. Moreover, the United States and Iran support the same government in Iraq and face common enemies (the Taliban and al-Qaeda) in Afghanistan. Iran has shown it can be a valuable ally when included as a partner, and a troublesome thorn when not. Offering Iran a place at the table cannot assure cooperation, but it will greatly increase the likelihood of cooperation by giving Iran something it highly values that it can lose by non-cooperation. The United States might start by appointing a special envoy with broad authority to deal comprehensively and constructively with Iran (as opposed to trading accusations) and explore its willingness to work with the United States on issues of common concern.

After many years of mutual hostility, no one should expect that engaging Iran will be easy. It may prove impossible. But past policies have not worked, and what has been largely missing from U.S. policy for most of the past three decades is a sustained commitment to real diplomacy with Iran. The time has come to see what true diplomacy can accomplish.

4. **Address the nuclear issue within the context of a broader U.S.-Iran opening.** Nothing is gained by imposing peremptory preconditions on dialogue. The United States should take an active leadership role in ongoing multilateral talks to resolve the nuclear impasse in the context of wide-ranging dialogue with Iran. Negotiators should give the nuclear talks a reasonable deadline, and retain the threat of tougher sanctions if negotiations fail. They should also, however, offer the credible prospect of security assurances and specific, tangible benefits such as the easing of U.S. sanctions in response to positive policy shifts in Iran. Active U.S. involvement may not cure all, but it certainly will change the equation, particularly if it is part of a broader opening.
5. **Re-energize the Arab-Israeli peace process and act as an honest broker in that process.** Israel's security lies in making peace with its neighbors. Any U.S. moves towards mediating the Arab-Israeli crisis in a balanced way would ease tensions in the region, and would be positively received as a step forward for peace. As a practical matter, however, experience has shown that any long-term solution to Israel's problems with the Palestinians and Lebanon probably will require dealing, directly or indirectly, with Hamas and Hezbollah. Iran supports these organizations, and thus has influence with them. If properly managed, a U.S. rapprochement with Iran, even an opening of talks, could help in dealing with Arab-Israeli issues, benefiting Israel as well as its neighbors.

Long-standing diplomatic practice makes clear that talking directly to a foreign government in no way signals approval of the government, its policies or its actions. Indeed, there are numerous instances in our history when clear-eyed U.S. diplomacy with regimes we deemed objectionable – e.g., Soviet Union, China, North Korea, Libya and Iran itself (cooperating in Afghanistan to topple the Taliban after 9/11) – produced positive results in difficult situations.

Annex

Basic Misconceptions about Iran

U.S. policies towards Iran have failed to achieve their objectives. A key reason for their failure is that they are rooted in fundamental misconceptions about Iran. This annex addresses eight key misconceptions that have driven U.S. policy in the wrong direction.

Myth # 1. President Ahmadinejad calls the shots on nuclear and foreign policy.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has grabbed the world's attention with his inflammatory and sometimes offensive statements. But he does not call the shots on Iran's nuclear and foreign policy. The ultimate decision-maker is Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the commander-in-chief of Iran's forces. Despite his frequently hostile rhetoric aimed at Israel and the West, Khamenei's track record reveals a cautious decision-maker who acts after consulting advisors holding a range of views, including views sharply critical of Ahmadinejad. That said, it is clear that U.S. policies and rhetoric have bolstered hard-liners in Iran, just as Ahmadinejad's confrontational rhetoric has bolstered hard-liners here.

Myth # 2. The political system of the Islamic Republic is frail and ripe for regime change.

In fact, there is currently no significant support within Iran for extra-constitutional regime change. Yes, there is popular dissatisfaction, but Iranians also recall the aftermath of their own revolution in 1979: lawlessness, mass executions, and the emigration of over half a million people, followed by a costly war. They have seen the outcome of U.S.-sponsored regime change in Afghanistan and in Iraq. They want no part of it. Regime change may come to Iran, but it would be folly to bet on it happening soon.

Myth # 3. The Iranian leadership's religious beliefs render them undeterrable.

The recent history of Iran makes crystal clear that national self-preservation and regional influence – not some quest for martyrdom in the service of Islam – is Iran's main foreign policy goal. For example:

- In the 1990s, Iran chose a closer relationship with Russia over support for rebellious Chechen Muslims.
- Iran actively supported and helped to finance the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.
- Iran has ceased its efforts to export the Islamic revolution

to other Persian Gulf states, in favor of developing good relations with the governments of those states.

- During the Iran-Iraq War, Iran took the pragmatic step of developing secret ties and trading arms with Israel, even as Iran and Israel denounced each other in public.

Myth # 4. Iran's current leadership is implacably opposed to the United States.

Iran will not accept preconditions for dialogue with the United States, any more than the United States would accept preconditions for talking to Iran. But Iran is clearly open to broad-ranging dialogue with the United States. In fact, it has made multiple peace overtures that the United States has rebuffed. Right after 9/11, Iran worked with the United States to get rid of the Taliban in Afghanistan, including paying for the Afghan troops serving under U.S. command. Iran helped establish the U.S.-backed government and then contributed more than \$750 million to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Iran expressed interest in a broader dialogue in 2002 and 2003. Instead, it was labeled part of an "axis of evil."

In 2005, reform-minded President Khatami was replaced by the hardliner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. But the same Supreme Leader who authorized earlier overtures is still in office today and he acknowledged, as recently as January 2008, that "the day that relations with America prove beneficial for the Iranian nation, I will be the first one to approve of that." All this does not prove that Iran will bargain in good faith with us. But it does disprove the claim that we know for sure they will not.

Myth # 5. Iran has declared its intention to attack Israel in order to "wipe Israel off the map."

This claim is based largely on a speech by President Ahmadinejad on Oct. 26, 2005, quoting a remark by Ayatollah Khomeini made decades ago: "This regime that is occupying Qods [Jerusalem] must be wiped off/eliminated from the pages of history/our times." Both before and since, Ahmadinejad has made numerous other, offensive, insulting and threatening remarks about Israel and other nations – most notably his indefensible denial of the Holocaust. However, he has been criticized within Iran for these remarks. Supreme Leader Khamenei himself has "clarified" that "the Islamic Republic has never threatened and will

never threaten any country” and specifically that Iran will not attack Israel unless Iran is attacked first. Ahmadinejad also has made clear, or been forced to clarify, that he was referring to regime change through demographics (giving the Palestinians a vote in a unitary state), not war. What we know is that Ahmadinejad’s recent statements do not appear to have materially altered Iran’s long-standing policy – which, for decades, has been to deny the legitimacy of Israel; to arm and aid groups opposing Israel in Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank; but also, to promise to accept any deal with Israel that the Palestinians accept.

Myth # 6. U.S.-sponsored “democracy promotion” can help bring about true democracy in Iran.

Instead of fostering democratic elements inside Iran, U.S.-backed “democracy promotion” has provided an excuse to stifle them. That is why champions of human rights and democracy in Iran agree with the dissident who said, “The best thing the Americans can do for democracy in Iran is not to support it.”

Myth # 7. Iran is clearly and firmly committed to developing nuclear weapons.

If Iraq teaches anything, it is the need to be both rigorous and honest when confronted with ambiguous evidence about WMDs. Yet once again we find proponents of conflict over-stating their case, this time by claiming that Iran has declared an intention to acquire nuclear weapons. In fact, Iranian leaders have consistently denied any such intention and even said that such weapons are “against Islam.”

The issue is not what Iran is saying, but what it is doing, and here the facts are murky. We know that Iran is openly enriching uranium and learning to do it more efficiently, but claims this is only for peaceful use. There are detailed but disputed allegations that Iran secretly worked on nuclear weapons design before Ahmadinejad came to power, concerns that such work continues, and certainty that Iran is not cooperating fully with efforts to resolve the allegations. We also know that Iran has said it will negotiate on its enrichment program – without preconditions – and submit to intrusive inspections as part of a final deal. Past negotiations between Iran and a group of three European countries plus China and Russia have not gone anywhere, but the United States, Iran’s chief nemesis, has not been active in those talks.

The facts viewed as a whole give cause for deep concern, but they are not unambiguous and in fact support a variety of interpretations: that Iran views enrichment chiefly as a source of national pride (akin to our moon landing); that Iran is advancing towards weapons capability but sees this as a bargaining chip to use in broader negotiations with the

United States; that Iran is intent on achieving the capability to build a weapon on short notice as a deterrent to feared U.S. or Israeli attack; or that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons to support aggressive goals. The only effective way to illuminate – and constructively alter – Iran’s intentions is through skillful and careful diplomacy. History shows that sanctions alone are unlikely to succeed, and a strategy limited to escalating threats or attacking Iran is likely to backfire – creating or hardening a resolve to acquire nuclear weapons while inciting a backlash against us throughout the region.

Myth # 8. Iran and the United States have no basis for dialogue.

Those who favored refusing Iran’s offers of dialogue in 2002 and 2003 – when they thought the U.S. position so strong there was no need to talk – now assert that our position is so weak we cannot afford to talk. Wrong in both cases. Iran is eager for an end to sanctions and isolation, and needs access to world-class technology to bring new supplies of oil and gas online. Both countries share an interest in stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan, which border Iran. Both support the Maliki government in Iraq, and face common enemies (the Taliban and al-Qaeda) in Afghanistan. Both countries share the goal of combating narco-trafficking in the region. These opportunities exist, and the two governments have pursued them very occasionally in the past, but they have mostly been obscured in the belligerent rhetoric from both sides.

About the Experts

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Dr. Banuazizi is the Past President of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and of the International Society for Iranian Studies. He served as the Editor of the *Journal of Iranian Studies* from 1968 to 1982. A leading expert on Iran and the Middle East Politics, he was a member of the Council of Foreign Relations' Task Force on Public Diplomacy.

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Dr. Boroujerdi is the author of *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (1996). His articles have appeared in numerous scholarly journals and more than a dozen edited books and Persian-language journals. He is the general editor of the *Modern Intellectual and Political History of the Middle East* series published by Syracuse University Press and served for seven years (2000 to 2007) as the book review editor of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. He is currently engaged in a major study of the current and next generation of political leaders in Iran.

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Juan Cole commands Arabic, Persian and Urdu, and has lived in various places in the Muslim world for extended periods of time. He also brings three decades of experience in studying and writing about contemporary Islamic movements and the relationship of the West and the Muslim world. His most recent book, *Engaging the Muslim World*, will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in March 2009. He has a regular column at Salon.com and is a frequent guest commentator on national radio and television news shows.

Ambassador James F. Dobbins

Former Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Representative to the Afghan opposition in the wake of September 11, 2001

For over three decades, Ambassador Dobbins has served both Republican and Democratic administrations in

diplomatic roles around the world, often in times of crisis. Immediately after September 11, 2001, he served as the Bush administration's Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Representative to the Afghan opposition, interacting successfully with the Iranians in a cooperative effort to topple the Taliban and promote the emergence of a friendly and democratic government in Kabul. His many other high-level posts include service as Assistant Secretary of State for Europe; Special Assistant to the President for the Western Hemisphere; Special Adviser to the President and Secretary of State for the Balkans; Ambassador to the European Community; and the Clinton Administration's Special Envoy for Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

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Rola el-Husseini specializes in Lebanon and Shi'a political thought. She is finishing a book on elite politics in postwar Lebanon, along with a comparative study of the impact of Iran on Iraqi and Lebanese Shi'a political thought. At the Bush School, she teaches courses on Middle East Politics, Political Islam, and Authoritarianism in the Arab World.

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Farideh Farhi is the author of *States and Urban-Based Revolutions in Iran and Nicaragua* along with numerous articles and book chapters on contemporary Iranian politics and foreign policy. She also authored the Asia Society's report on Iran's 2001 elections; the International Crisis Group's report on the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran; and, a soon to be published World Bank study, *Contested Governance and the Need for Reform: The Case of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. She has taught at the University of Colorado, Boulder; University of Hawaii; University of Tehran and Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran. Her research sponsors include the United States Institute of Peace, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars where she was recently a Public Policy Scholar. She travels widely and lectures regularly on Iranian politics and foreign relations at research institutions in Washington, D.C. and around the country.

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Geoffrey Forden is among America's foremost experts on how proliferators acquire the know-how and industrial infrastructure to produce weapons of mass destruction. In 2002-2003, Dr. Forden served as the first Chief of Multidiscipline Analysis Section for UNMOVIC, the UN agency responsible for verifying and monitoring the dismantlement of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. He has also served as a strategic weapons analyst in the National Security Division of the Congressional Budget Office.

Hadi Ghaemi

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Hadi Ghaemi is the coordinator of the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, and an internationally recognized expert on the situation of human rights in Iran. Ghaemi's reports and writings have focused international attention on the Iranian government's repression of free speech and persecution of civil society activists. He works closely with human rights defenders inside Iran to document and report on human rights violations. In 2003, he received a research and writing grant from the MacArthur Foundation. He served as the Iran and UAE researcher for Human Rights Watch until 2007. Ghaemi received his Ph.D. in physics from Boston University in 1994, and he was on the faculty at the City University of New York until 2000.

Philip Giraldi

Former CIA Counter-terrorism Specialist

Philip Giraldi is a former CIA counter-terrorism specialist and military intelligence officer who served eighteen years overseas in Turkey, Italy, Germany, and Spain, where he was Chief of Base in Barcelona from 1989 to 1992. As a recognized authority on international security and counterterrorism issues he has appeared often on radio and TV, including "Good Morning America," "60 Minutes," MSNBC, NPR, BBC World News, FOX News, Polish National Television, Croatian National Television, al-Jazeera, and al-Arabiya. Currently, he is President of San Marco International, a consulting firm that specializes in international security management and risk assessment, and also a partner in Cannistraro Associates, a security consultancy located in McLean Virginia.

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As a leading scholar on issues of the Middle East, Dr. Kazemi is a member of the Advisory Group for Public Diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim World, appointed in 2003. He is also President of the Middle Eastern Studies Association, former President of the Society for Iranian

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Stephen Kinzer

Author and award-winning foreign correspondent

Stephen Kinzer is an award-winning foreign correspondent who has covered more than 50 countries on five continents – primarily for the New York Times, where he worked for more than 20 years. He is the author of numerous books and articles focusing on Iran and the Middle East, including *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* and *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*. He now teaches journalism and political science at Northwestern University, contributes articles to the New York Review of Books and other periodicals, and writes a world affairs column for *The Guardian*.

Ambassador William G. Miller

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Ambassador Miller has led a long and distinguished career in the U.S. Foreign Service, U.S. Senate staff, academia, foundations, and non-profit organizations. Ambassador Miller served as political officer for the U.S. Embassy in Tehran from 1962 to 1964 as well as the U.S. Consulate in Isfahan, Iran from 1959 to 1962. He then spent 14 years on Capitol Hill, where he served as the staff director for three different Senate committees, including the Select Committee on Intelligence. Ambassador Miller has taught at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy, and Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

Emile A. Nakhleh

Retired Senior Intelligence Service Officer and Director of the Political Islam Strategic Analysis Program in the Directorate of Intelligence at the CIA

During his fifteen years of service at the CIA, Dr. Emile A. Nakhleh held a variety of key positions, including Director of the Political Islam Strategic Analysis Program in the Directorate of Intelligence and Chief of the Regional Analysis Unit in the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Dr. Nakhleh was a founding member of the Senior Analytic Service and chaired the first SAS Council. He was awarded several senior intelligence commendation medals, including the Intelligence Commendation Medal (1997), the William Langer Award (2004), the Director's Medal (2004), and the Distinguished Career Intelligence Medal (2006). His research has focused on political Islam in the Middle East and the rest of the Muslim world as well as on political and educational reform, regime stability, and governance in the greater Middle East.

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Professor of International Relations and Anthropology at Boston University

A. Richard Norton served as an advisor to the Iraq Study Group (Baker-Hamilton Commission), and he is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. His research experience in the Middle East spans near three decades, including residences in Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Lebanon. His current research interests include inter-sectarian relations in the Middle East, reformist Muslim thought, and strategies of political reform and opposition in authoritarian states. In the 1990s he headed a widely-cited three-year project funded by the Ford Foundation that examined the state-society relations in the Middle East and the question of civil society in the region. He is also a co-founder of the *Boston Forum on the Middle East* and the *Conference Group on the Middle East*.

Richard Parker

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Dr. Parker is a professor at University of Connecticut School of Law and Founder and Executive Director of the new American Foreign Policy Project (AFPP). AFPP convenes large teams of top experts to collaboratively develop sound policy on the toughest national security and foreign policy issues of the day. It translates these policies into effective messages in ready-to-use talking point format, and then disseminates these messages to leaders, key influencers and the public through a variety of channels – briefings, traditional media, blogs, and a unique, highly-searchable website, americanforeignpolicy.org. Dr. Parker has served as Assistant General Counsel in the Office of the United States Trade Representative and Special Counsel to the Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. He holds a B.A. in Public and International Affairs from Princeton University, a J.D. from Yale Law School, and a D.Phil. in International Relations from Oxford University, which he attended as a Rhodes Scholar.

Trita Parsi

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Trita Parsi is the author of *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Iran, Israel and the United States*, which won the 2008 Silver Medal Recipient of the Council on Foreign Relations Arthur Ross Book Award. Fluent in Persian/Farsi, Dr. Parsi is regularly consulted by Western, Middle Eastern and Asian governments on Middle East affairs, and he is a co-founder and current President of the National Iranian American Council, a non-partisan, non-profit organization promoting Iranian-American participation in American civic life. His articles on Middle East affairs have been published in the Financial Times, Jane's Intelligence

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Ambassador Pickering has had a career spanning five decades as a U.S. diplomat, serving as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Ambassador to the United Nations, Ambassador to Russia, India, Israel, Nigeria, Jordan and El Salvador. He also served on assignments in Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. He holds the personal rank of Career Ambassador, the highest in the U.S. Foreign Service. He has held numerous other positions at the State Department, including Executive Secretary and Special Assistant to Secretaries Rogers and Kissinger and Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Oceans, Environmental and Scientific Affairs. He is currently Vice-chairman of Hills & Company, an international consulting firm providing advice to U.S. businesses on investment, trade, and risk assessment issues abroad, particularly in emerging market economies. He is based in Washington, DC.

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Barnett Rubin has written numerous books and articles on conflict prevention, state formation, and human rights. His articles have appeared in Foreign Affairs, International Affairs, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The New York Review of Books, and elsewhere. In late 2001, he served as Special Advisor to the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan during the negotiations that produced the Bonn Agreement, and he also advised the United Nations on the drafting of the constitution of Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Compact, and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. He has served as the Director of the Center for Preventive Action, and Director, Peace and Conflict Studies, at the Council on Foreign Relations, as well as the Director of the Center for the Study of Central Asia at Columbia University. Currently, he is Director of Studies and Senior Fellow at the Center on International Cooperation of New York University, where he directs the program on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan.

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November 2008

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Lynn Kunkle and Chic Dambach to the genesis and development of this project, the statement and its message. Barbara Slavin, Barnett Rubin, Farideh Farhi, Rola el-Husseini, Philip Giraldi, Jake Colvin, and Jon Wolfsthal authored commissioned papers on which this statement draws. Evan Ream, Asher Berman, Rachel Lipsey, Jacob Poushter and Leslie Schaefer provided valuable research assistance. Finally, we thank The Connect U.S. Fund, the Ploughshares Fund, The Pluralism Fund, and our individual donors for generous financial support.

Disclaimer

This statement is the product of a large group of experts with diverse knowledge, experience and affiliations. While all members strongly support the general policy thrust and judgments reflected in this statement, they may not necessarily all concur with every specific assertion or recommendation contained therein.



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