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GOVERNMENT INFORMATION, AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**

I am most grateful for your kind invitation to discuss American policy toward Iran. Sadly, recent events, most notably the Iranian-sponsored attacks against Israel from Lebanon and Gaza--have made this discussion more urgent than ever. But that is what often happens when successive administrations, of both political parties and of various political convictions, avoid dealing with a serious problem. It doesn't go away. Instead, the problem gets worse and the cost of dealing with it becomes more and more burdensome. The theocratic tyranny in Tehran is a very serious problem, and it is becoming graver. It has already cost a great number of American lives, and an even greater number of innocent Iranians, Iraqis, Israelis, Lebanese, Argentinians and others around the world have fallen prey to the mullahs. And now they are hell-bent to become a nuclear power.

The bottom line is that the Islamic Republic of Iran has been at war with us for twenty-seven years, and we have yet to respond. Fanatical Iranians overran the American Embassy in Tehran in 1979 and subjected diplomats to four hundred forty-four days of confinement and humiliation. Our policy was to negotiate a deal, which was consummated in the last hour of the Carter Administration. In the mid-1980s, Iranian-supported terrorists from Hizbollah killed hundreds of Americans in our Beirut Embassy, and, six months later, killed two hundred forty-one Marines in their barracks there. A couple of years after that, Hizbollah took other Americans hostage, from the CIA station chief in Beirut to Christian priests to a distinguished military man, Colonel Higgins, who had served as General Colin Powell's military assistant in the Pentagon. The priests were eventually ransomed; Higgins and Buckley were tortured and murdered.

No one should have been surprised that the Islamic Republic waged war against us from its first days in power. After all, the founder of the Iranian clerical fascist state, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, declared America "the great Satan," an existential threat to the Islamic Republic as to all true Muslims.

They have waged an unholy proxy war against us ever since. They created Hizbollah and Islamic Jihad, and they support most all the others, from Hamas and al Qaeda to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine--General Command. Iran's proxies range from Shi'ites to Sunnis to Marxists, all cannon fodder for the overriding objective to dominate or destroy us.

This point needs to be stressed, since a lot of nonsense has been written about the theoretically unbridgeable divide between Sunnis and Shi'ites, and we should remind

ourselves that the tyrants of the Islamic Republic do not share these theories. The recent terrorist assault on Israel—a coordinated two-front war—was conducted by Hamas and Hizbollah. The one is Sunni, the other, Shi'ite. Both are Iranian proxies. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards—as Shi'ite as they come—were trained in Lebanon's Bekka Valley, beginning in the early 1970s, by Yasser Arafat's Sunni al Fatah. Arafat, whose pedigree came from the Sunni Islamic Brotherhood, was the first foreign leader to be invited to Tehran after the overthrow of the shah, proving that when it comes to killing infidels, theological disagreements are secondary to the *jihad*. Yet for decades, we have been deceived by experts, in and out of government, who maintained that such cooperation—including cooperation between countries like Iran and Syria—was next to impossible.

It was very good news, therefore, that the White House immediately denounced Iran and Syria for Hizbollah's attack on Israel, just as Ambassador Khalilzad, on the 12th of July, tagged the terrorist siamese twins as sponsors of terrorism in Iraq. One of the best informed people in that country, who blogs under the title of "Iraq the Model" put it very well, if a bit ungrammatically:

“Hizbollah is Iran's and Syria's partner in feeding instability in Iraq as there were evidence that this terror group has a role in equipping and training insurgents in Iraq and Hizbollah had more than once openly showed support for the "resistance" in Iraq and sponsored the meetings of Baathist and radical Islamist militants who are responsible for most of the violence in Iraq.”

When he says Iran “sponsored the meetings of Baathist and radical Islamist militants...” he is talking about Sunnis, the same Sunnis who, according to CIA deep thinkers and scads of academic experts, cannot possibly work closely with Shi'ites like the mullahs of Tehran. Iraq the Model isn't burdened by this wisdom, and so he just reports what he sees on the ground in his own country.

It is no accident that, the weekend before the two-front attack on Israel, there was a “security summit” in Tehran, involving all of Iraq's neighbors, at which Iran's infamous President Ahmadi-Nezhad issued one of his trademark warnings to Israel. “The existence of this regime will bring nothing but suffering and misery for people in the region,” he raged, and then said that the anger of the people might soon “lead to a vast explosion that will know no boundaries.”

Perhaps he had a hint of what would soon explode. And well he should, because Iran has been quite busy in Lebanon of late. The Lebanese Tourism Ministry's Research Center announced an amazing statistic in early July: in the first six months of the year, 60,888 Iranian tourists visited Lebanon. No other Asian country came close (the Philippines ranked second, with a bit over 12,000). Iranians are poor, suffering under the predations of greedy rulers and the usual miseries of a controlled economy. It is hard to believe that more than 12,000 Iranian “tourists” headed for the Beirut beaches each month without a considerable subsidy. Many of them were undoubtedly working for the Revolutionary Guards Corps, or were Hizbollah operations people.

Iran is invariably atop the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism, and we know from public court records in Italy and Germany that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi created a European-wide terrorist network in the latter years of the last century from a stronghold in Tehran. Among the evidence introduced by the prosecution were intercepts of phone conversations between terrorists in Europe and Zarqawi in Tehran.

We also know—from abundant evidence ranging from documents to photographs captured by American forces in both Fallujah and Hilla—of the intimate working relationships between terrorists in Iraq and the regimes in Tehran and Damascus. Indeed, the terror war in Iraq is a replay of the strategy that the Iranians and the Syrians used in the 1980s to drive us and our French allies out of Lebanon. Those Americans who believed it was possible to wage the war against terrorism one country at a time, and that we could therefore achieve a relatively peaceful transition from Saddam's dictatorship to an elected democracy, did not listen to the many public statements from Tehran and its sister city in *jihād*, Damascus, announcing in advance that Iraq was about to become the "new Lebanon."

It is open knowledge that Iran is making bigger and badder IEDs—the roadside bombs that are the single greatest cause of death and injury to our sons and daughters in Iraq—and sending them to the terrorists across the border. The British press has long reported this fact, which has been confirmed by Secretary of State Rumsfeld, and by Richard Clarke, the former White House counterterrorism chief, who put it bluntly: "I think it's very hard to escape the conclusion that...the Iranian government is knowingly killing U.S. troops."

There are still those in Foggy Bottom, Langley or academia who believe that somehow we can sort out our differences with the Islamic Republic. I wish they were right, but the Iranians' behavior proves otherwise. Religious fanatics of the sort that rule Iran do not want a deal with the devil. They want us dominated or dead. There is no escape from their hatred, or from the war they have waged against us. We can either win or lose, but no combination of diplomatic demarches, economic sanctions, and earnest negotiations, can change that fatal equation. It is not our fault. It is their choice.

THE NUCLEAR QUESTION

A few months ago, the CIA concluded that Iran could not produce nuclear weapons in less than a decade, but given the history of such predictions, we should be very skeptical of that timeline. Some Russian experts reportedly think it could be a matter of months, and they probably have better information than we do.

Numerous Iranian leaders have said that they intend to use nuclear weapons to destroy Israel, and contemporary history suggests that one should take such statements at face

value. A nuclear Iran would be a more influential regional force, and since its missiles now reach deep into Europe, it would directly menace the West. Moreover, once Iran manages to put nuclear warheads on their intermediate range missiles, they might even be able to direct them against American territory from one or more of the Latin American countries with which the mullahs are establishing strategic alliances.

I would be the last to suggest we should not do everything possible to prevent the emergence of a nuclear Iran. But the nuclear question simply adds urgency to the Iranian threat, which is already enormous, and which should have prompted our maximum thought and energy long since.

The mullahs don't need atomic bombs to kill large numbers of Americans; they have long worked on other weapons of mass destruction, and they have an imposing network of terrorists all over the Western world. Hardly a day goes by without chest-pounding speeches from the mullahs warning us about the wave of suicide bombers headed our way. I am afraid that the obsession with the nuclear question often obscures the central policy issue: that the Islamic Republic has waged war against us for many years and is killing Americans every week. They would do that even if they had no chance of developing atomic bombs, and they will do that even if, by some miracle, the feckless and endlessly self-deluding governments of the West manage to dismantle the secret atomic facilities and impose an effective inspection program. The mullahs will do that because it is their essence. It is what they are.

The nuclear threat is inseparable from the nature of the regime. If there were a freely elected, democratic government in Tehran, instead of the self-selecting tyranny of the mullahs, we would in all likelihood be dealing with a pro-Western country that would be more interested in good trade and cultural relations than in nuclear warheads.

In other words, it's all about the regime. Change the regime, and the nuclear question becomes manageable. Leave the mullahs in place, and the nuclear weapons directly threaten us and our friends and allies, raising the ante of the terror war they started twenty-seven years ago.

And still no Western leader at any time in all these years has advocated regime change in Iran.

WHAT TO DO?

The first step is to abandon the self-deception that we will be able to arrive at a negotiated settlement. It can't be done. The Iranians view negotiations as merely tactical enterprises in support of their strategic objectives. The London Sunday Telegraph

reported several months ago that Hassan Rowhani, the mullah in charge of nuclear negotiations with the Europeans, bragged in a public speech that Iran had duped European Union negotiators into thinking it had halted efforts to make nuclear fuel while in reality it continued to install equipment to process yellowcake -- a key stage in the nuclear-fuel process.

It could hardly be clearer, or so one would think. The “negotiations” were merely a tactic.

Nor is there any reason to believe we can count on the United Nations to impose the rules of civilized behavior on the mullahs, either on nuclear issues or terrorism. The Supreme Leader, Ali Khamene’i, has told his associates that Iran now has a “strategic relationship” with Putin’s Russia, and that China is so dependent on Iranian oil that it is highly unlikely Peking would vote against Tehran in the Security Council.

That leaves us with three courses of action, none of which is automatically exclusive of the others: sanctions, military strikes, and support for democratic revolution.

SANCTIONS

I do not know of a case in which sanctions have produced a change in behavior by a hostile regime. The two cases in which sanctions seem to have worked had to do with regimes that thought of themselves as friends of the United States, and wanted to be embraced by us: Pinochet’s Chile and apartheid South Africa. Enemy regimes don’t respond to sanctions, whether it be Castro’s Cuba or Qaddafi’s Libya or the Soviet Empire. Indeed, sanctions aimed against the national economy are misconceived, because they harm the people—who are highly likely to be our best weapon against the tyrants—while leaving the tyrannical and oppressive elite largely untouched.

We should want to punish hostile regimes and help the people. Big-time economic sanctions or embargoes cannot do that, but very limited sanctions and other economic and financial actions can. I am very much in favor of seizing the assets of the Iranian leaders, because while the mullahs have ruined the lives of most Iranians, they have greatly enriched themselves at the people’s expense, and a good deal of that money has been squirreled away in foreign bank accounts. That money properly belongs to the Iranian people, whose misery grows from day to day. We should hold it for them, and return it to a freely elected government after we have helped them overthrow their oppressors.

I also agree that a travel ban on the top leaders would be useful, if for no other reason than its symbolic value. It tells the Iranian people that we consider the mullahs unworthy of acceptance in the civilized world; it brands the mullahs for what they are. The Iranians know it far better than we. But they need to see that we have taken sides, and the travel ban is one good way to do that.

MILITARY ACTION

While nobody this side of the yellow press is talking about an invasion of Iran, there is considerable speculation about limited strikes against nuclear facilities. I do not know enough to be able to offer an informed opinion on this matter. I would only point out that our intelligence about Iran has been bad since before the revolution of 1979, and one would have to be very optimistic to base a military plan on our current intelligence product. Iranians are skilled at deceit, and have been hiding their nuclear projects from us for a long time.

Military action carries enormous risks. Some number of Iranians would likely be inclined to rally to the national defense, even if they hate the regime. It's impossible to estimate how many of them would take this path. Moreover, there would inevitably be innocent victims, and our strategy should aim at saving innocents, not killing them. On our side of the equation, it is virtually certain that Iran would respond with a wave of terrorism, from Iraq to Europe to the homeland, and with efforts to drive up the price of oil even higher.

That said, our failure to design and conduct a serious Iran policy for so long has narrowed our options, and we may be faced with a choice among various unattractive actions. If we and our allies decide that Iranian nuclear facilities must be taken out, we should first make clear to the Iranian people that we have come slowly and reluctantly to this position, that the regime could have avoided this terrible situation by negotiating in good faith, and that we would never dream of doing such a thing if Iran were governed by reasonable people.

In fact, whatever policy we adopt, it is very important for us to talk—a lot—to the Iranian people.

REVOLUTION

Iran had three revolutions in the twentieth century, and boasts a long tradition of self-government. The demographics certainly favor radical change: roughly 70% of Iranians are twenty-nine years old or less. We know from the regime's own public opinion surveys that upwards of 73% of the people would like a freer society and a more democratic government, and they constantly demonstrate their hatred of the regime in public protests (from oppressed ethnic groups to university students and public employees), in the blogosphere in both Farsi (the internet's fourth most popular language) and English, in strikes ranging from the oil workers to the Tehran bus drivers, and from time to time in violent acts against officials on the ground. The regime's reaction is ruthless, but the protests continue, and there is good reason to believe that the mullahs are extremely worried. In response to recent demonstrations in Khuzestan, the

oil-producing region in the south, the regime sent in members of the Badr Brigade (the Iranian-trained militia in Iraq) and of (Lebanese) Hizbollah. This suggests a lack of confidence in the more traditional security organizations: the regular Army, the Revolutionary Guards, and the thuggish Basij, generally described as fanatically loyal to the Islamic ideals of the mullahcracy.

Yet, just as it was generally believed that there was no hope of a peaceful overthrow of the Soviet Empire, today the conventional wisdom intones that there is no hope for democratic revolution in Iran, and even if there were, we no longer have enough time for it. As if one could fine tune the timing of a revolution!

The pessimism is as bizarre as it is discouraging. We empowered a successful revolution in the Soviet Empire with the active support of a very small percentage of the population. In Iran revolution is the dream of at least 70% of the people. The regime is famously vicious, as the mounting numbers of executions and the ongoing torture in Iran's prisons unfortunately demonstrate. But the KGB was no less vicious, and tyranny is the most unstable form of government. We should remind ourselves that democratic revolution invariably surprises us. If anyone had forecast a successful democratic revolution in the Ukraine, even three months before it occurred, most of us would have considered it a fantasy.

Nobody knows with certainty whether revolution can succeed in Iran, or, if it can, how long it will take. But in recent years a surprising number of revolutions have toppled tyrants all over the world. Most of them got help from us, which should not surprise Americans. Most revolutions, including our own, required external support in order to succeed, and there is a widespread belief in Iran that a democratic revolution cannot defeat the mullahs unless it is supported by the United States. They are waiting for concrete signs of our support.

Support means, above all, a constant critique by our leaders of the regime's murderous actions, and constant encouragement of freedom and democracy. Too many people have forgotten the enormous impact of Ronald Reagan's denunciation of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." The intellectual elite of this country condemned that speech as stupid and dangerous, yet we learned from the Soviet dissidents that it was enormously important, because it showed that we understood the nature of the Soviet regime, and were committed to its defeat. In like manner, the Iranians need to see that we want an end to the Islamic Republic. We need to tell them that we want, and will support, regime change in their country, peaceful, non-violent regime change, not revolution from the barrel of a gun.

We also need to talk to them very specifically about how such revolutions succeed. We should greatly expand our support for private radio and television broadcasters, both here and in Europe, and we need to get serious about using our own broadcasts as

revolutionary instruments. We should not compete for market share, and we should not be in the entertainment business; we should be broadcasting interviews with successful revolutionaries from other countries, as well as with the few Iranian dissidents who reach the free world. We should also broadcast conversations with experts on non-violent revolution. The Iranians need to learn, in detail, what works and what does not. They need to see and hear the experiences of their revolutionary comrades.

We must also provide them with the wherewithal for two vitally important revolutionary actions: build resources for a strike fund, and get them modern instruments of communication. The strike fund speaks for itself: workers need to be able to walk off the job, knowing they will be able to feed their families for several weeks. The instruments of communication include servers, laptops, satellite and cell phones and phone cards.

Finally, the president should appoint an eloquent, charismatic person to advise him on Iranian policy, and to work closely with Congress in its design and implementation. Once again, the Iranian people need to see real action. They have heard lots of fine speeches, now it's time to move.