

PRESIDENT OBAMA AND IRAN



ENGAGEMENT, ISOLATION, REGIME CHANGE

Raymond Tanter

UPDATED EDITION

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Iran Policy Committee

Raymond Tanter, Georgetown University; University of Michigan

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A WHITE PAPER



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Hundreds of thousands of protestors gather in Tehran's Azadi (Freedom) Square on 15 June 2009 to protest the fraudulent election victory of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; protests evolved into demonstrations against the Iranian system of government, its Supreme Leader Khamenei, and those opposition figures who sold out to the regime, such as Mir Hossein Mousavi.

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CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
AEDPA	Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act
bbl	Barrel (volume measurement for petroleum products)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
EU	European Union
EU-3	Great Britain, France, and Germany
E3+3	Great Britain, France, Germany, United States, Russia, and China
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organization
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HEU	Highly Enriched Uranium
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IPC	Iran Policy Committee
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
ISIS	Institute for Science and International Security
ISNA	Iranian Student’s News Agency
LEU	Low Enriched Uranium
MEK	Mujahedeen-e Khalq
MOIS	Ministry of Intelligence and Security
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCRI	National Council of Resistance of Iran
NCRI-US	National Council of Resistance of Iran, U.S. Representative Office
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
P5+1	Permanent Five UN Security Council Members Plus Germany
PMOI	People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran
POAC	Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization



Lt. Gen. Thomas
McInerney (USAF, Ret.)



Maj. Gen. Paul Vallely
(USA, Ret.)

“Through the power of our diplomacy, a world that was once divided about how to deal with Iran’s nuclear program now stands as one. The regime is more isolated than ever before; its leaders are faced with crippling sanctions, and as long as they shirk their responsibilities, this pressure will not relent. Let there be no doubt: America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal.”¹

*President Barack Obama
State of the Union Address,
25 January 2012*

The President’s remarks came after escalating events in 2011 resulted in a heightened threat assessment of Iran during early 2012.

In October, Iran announced plans to move nuclear material to an underground

Fordow site near the holy city of Qom to launch additional nuclear enrichment.

During November, the UN watchdog nuclear agency reported Iran carried out activities “relevant to development of a nuclear explosive device,” “and that some activities may still be ongoing.”² Also in November, protesters in Tehran sacked the UK embassy compound during a demonstration against sanctions imposed by Britain, and the U.S. Justice Department accused Iranian agents of plotting to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to Washington.

And in December, a senior Iranian official stated Tehran would retaliate against any new oil sanctions by blocking all oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital artery for transporting about one-fifth of the world’s oil supply.

During January, 2012, the European Union

announced a phased oil embargo, partial asset freeze of the Central Bank of Iran, measures against Iran's petrochemical sector, and a ban on Iranian transactions involving gold; warships from the UK and France joined a U.S. carrier group to transit the Strait of Hormuz, despite a warning by Iranian officials for an American carrier to stay out of the Gulf.

Partly as a result of the November assassination plot, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence gave a higher estimate of the Iranian threat in congressional testimony on 31 January 2012:

The 2011 plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States shows that some Iranian officials—probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—have changed their calculus and are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived US actions that threaten the regime. We are also concerned about Iranian plotting against US or allied interests overseas.³

In the context of the new intelligence threat assessment, consider the heady days of engagement. President Obama entered the Oval Office in 2009 and reached his hand out to the Iranian leadership; but he received only a

clenched fist in return. He sought the promise of a new beginning grounded in mutual respect, only to be rebuffed by Iranian leaders. With failure of engagement, the President turned to sanctions and threat of military action embodied in, "I will take no options off the table."

Missing from these policies is regime change based on Iranian opposition organizations. And when a newspaper quoted a senior American intelligence official saying regime change was a goal of U.S. sanctions against Iran, the Obama administration pushed back resulting in a revised story claiming only "public ire" rather than "regime change" as a purpose of new sanctions.⁴

Despite accusations from Tehran that the United States is supporting regime change in Iran by stimulating a "soft" or "color" revolution, there is scant evidence of such a regime change policy by Washington. Statements by Vice President Joe Biden and National Security Adviser Jim Jones are consistent with internal regime change aspirations but not assisted by the United States.⁵ Although the comment by Jones links sanctions to regime change, opposition from Russia caused the White House to walk back from such an explicit linkage.⁶



Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who displaced Moscow ally Eduard Shevardnadze following the 2003 Rose Revolution.

Isolation of Iran by President Obama is not as firm as by his predecessor, George W. Bush. While Bush used the term “rogue state,” and placed Iran in an “axis of evil,” the Obama administration describes Iran as an “outlier,” implying it has a path to respectability.⁷

Chapter One discusses how American presidents have been stuck on the horns of a false dilemma between pursuit of containment via two main alternatives—engagement or isolation. One such alternative is to engage, isolate, and then encourage political change by reaching out to the Iranian people, including those within Iran as well as those who are in the Iranian Diaspora but have a major presence in Iran.

Chapter Two revisits how President Obama can avoid the false dichotomy between isolation and engagement, i.e., by incorporating the Iranian opposition into his policies.

Chapter Three treats the topic of what to do when diplomacy falters, politics of the Iranian street escalates then declines, while prospects of military action remain risky; the Obama team’s rhetoric could emphasize prodemocracy dissident forces just as it adopts “crippling sanctions” to coerce Tehran to make concessions in its quest to become a nuclear weapons-capable state.

A theme underlying these three chapters is how the Obama administration can encourage a Color Revolution in Iran as in the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia and the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine. In the case of Georgia, there was a



Thousands of protestors gather in Independence Square in Kiev during the November 2004 Orange Revolution.

pro-American faction of the ruling elite that broke from President Eduard Shevardnadze and assumed leadership of a pro-democracy opposition. In Ukraine, a pro-American candidate initially lost to a pro-Russian candidate, but street protests subsequently swept him into power.

Given the conflicting personalities that comprise the character of President Obama, one can only hope that the rough and tumble Chicago politician who ordered the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011 trumps the University law professor to make the tough decision necessary to facilitate a Green Revolution for Iran.

Such a revolution is more likely to occur in Iran if Washington removed an unwarranted terrorist designation from the main opposition organization that does not accept clerical rule in Iran: a parliament in exile, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and its largest unit, the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MeK). Both are on the U.S. terrorist list, although the law and facts do not justify such listing.⁸

If the Obama administration removed the terrorist tag from the NCRI and the

MeK, they would be in a better position to enhance their place in Iran as leaders of regime change from within. MeK members also are under siege in Iraq by Baghdad at the behest of Tehran, under the guise that terrorists deserve mistreatment; consequently, the MeK is hamstrung from leading the pro-democracy forces in Iran.

The plight of 3,400 MeK members in Iraq is a Catch-22. They agreed to leave Iraq for safety in third countries; but it is difficult to resettle them with the terrorist tag on the MeK.⁹ Meanwhile, Baghdad refuses to allow the UN to carry out interviews to reclassify them from asylum seekers to refugee status, a requirement for resettlement.

If Washington fails to remove the terrorist tag from Iranian opposition organizations, President Obama's pledge of taking no options off the table to keep Iran from acquiring the bomb makes military action more likely because the regime change option is off the table so long as the principal Iranian opposition is on the American terrorist list.

President Obama:

By removing Iranian dissident groups

from the U.S. terrorist list, you can avoid a humanitarian catastrophe of their probable slaughter in Iraq; facilitate expatriate oppositionists help counterparts in Iran with funding and communications equipment; and most importantly, make possible for the leadership of the main organizations of Iranian dissidents to work for regime change from within Iran.

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER 1

Stuck between Isolation
and Engagement

A FALSE DILEMMA PLAGUING AMERICAN PRESIDENTS

When formulating U.S. policy toward Iran, American presidents have faced a false dichotomy between isolation and engagement—sanctions and inducements. A common theme underlying American approaches to post-revolutionary Iran is pursuit of containment via these two options instead of searching for other alternatives. One such course of action is a policy package to engage, isolate, and encourage democratic change by reaching out to the Iranian people. Doing so would resolve the false dichotomy and make containment moot for a democratic Iran.

Across several decades, presidents have alternated between policies of antagonism and friendliness, sometimes pursued simultaneously, with little impact on the behavior of the Iranian regime. Because it is ideological in nature, the regime is singularly focused on survival of clerical rule to perpetuate the 1979 Iranian Revolution, not on the American agenda. Hence, neither isolation nor engagement or a combination of both results in compliance with American demands or desires.

As the regime looks inward to survive the democratic demands of its own people,

it ignores Washington's commands and wishes. Facing failed engagement and issuing incredible threats of military action, U.S. presidents find themselves in a bind regarding Iran. Because regime survival is such a driver of Iranian policy, American policy must come to grips with the Iranian opposition to break out of this quandary.

As the Obama administration seeks to formulate a coherent policy toward Iran, it is heading down a road well travelled: Downplaying the opposition, engaging the regime, and threatening to expand sanctions in search of a nuclear accord will not deter Iran from its quest for nuclear-armed status or bring democracy to Iran. Presidents before Obama generally have chosen containment over democratic change in dealing with revolutionary Iran and have not broken out of the predicament in dealing with Tehran.

To understand how the Obama administration can avoid the conundrum that has entrapped prior presidents, consider how they have assumed a tradeoff between containment and democratic change. As threats to the United States evolved from state actors to non-state actors and from conventional to unconventional tactics, the focus of American foreign policy had been on stable deterrence over democratic change.

But in the post-War world, U.S. policy sought to balance stability with support for democracy.

ROOSEVELT

In part because Washington misunderstood Imperial Japan's dependence on oil and its sensitivity to the cutting off of U.S. oil supplies, the United States was surprised by Tokyo's attack at Pearl Harbor on 7 December

1941. That assault precipitated a sea change in the U.S. role in the world and subsequently produced a major transformation of strategy during the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Although FDR was ahead of the curve in favoring intervention in Europe prior to Pearl Harbor, U.S. foreign policy elites and the American electorate exhibited an isolationist mood that was only broken



The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.

by the realization that the United States was not impervious to attack.

Roosevelt rallied the American public not only against Japan, but also against German aggression in Europe. Following World War Two, the United States paid more attention to the internal politics of its erstwhile adversaries. America and its allies transformed Japan and Germany into democratic states, under the assumption that democracies were more peaceful than dictatorships. With the shift to democracy, deterrence became irrelevant for American allies.

To transform prior enemies from dictatorships to democracies required a focus on both external threats as well as domestic politics. Hence, the era of American isolationism was over, and the stage was set for the global role the United States continues to play today. A critical part of this worldwide task is balancing the quest for stability with promotion of democracy.

TRUMAN

President Truman cemented the expanded international role assumed under President Roosevelt. One of the most important policies of the Truman administration was provision of political-economic assistance to Greece and Turkey. Strengthening vulnerable

domestic institutions to prevent the spread of Communism to these two countries, the Truman administration displayed a healthy regard for how democracy can be an antidote to the spread of Communism.

Truman responded to the beginning of the Cold War with the Soviet Union by implementing a strategy of containment. One half of the coin of containment was deterrence of the Soviet Union via military alliances; the other half was to effect a democratic transformation of the Soviet Union, its captive republics, and Eastern European satellites. With democratization, deterrence has become less relevant in American-Russian relations.

The spread of democracy would be a bulwark against the spread of Communism. Rather than being stuck on the dichotomy of deterrence or democracy, the Truman administration practiced deterrence and advocated democracy for all of Europe.

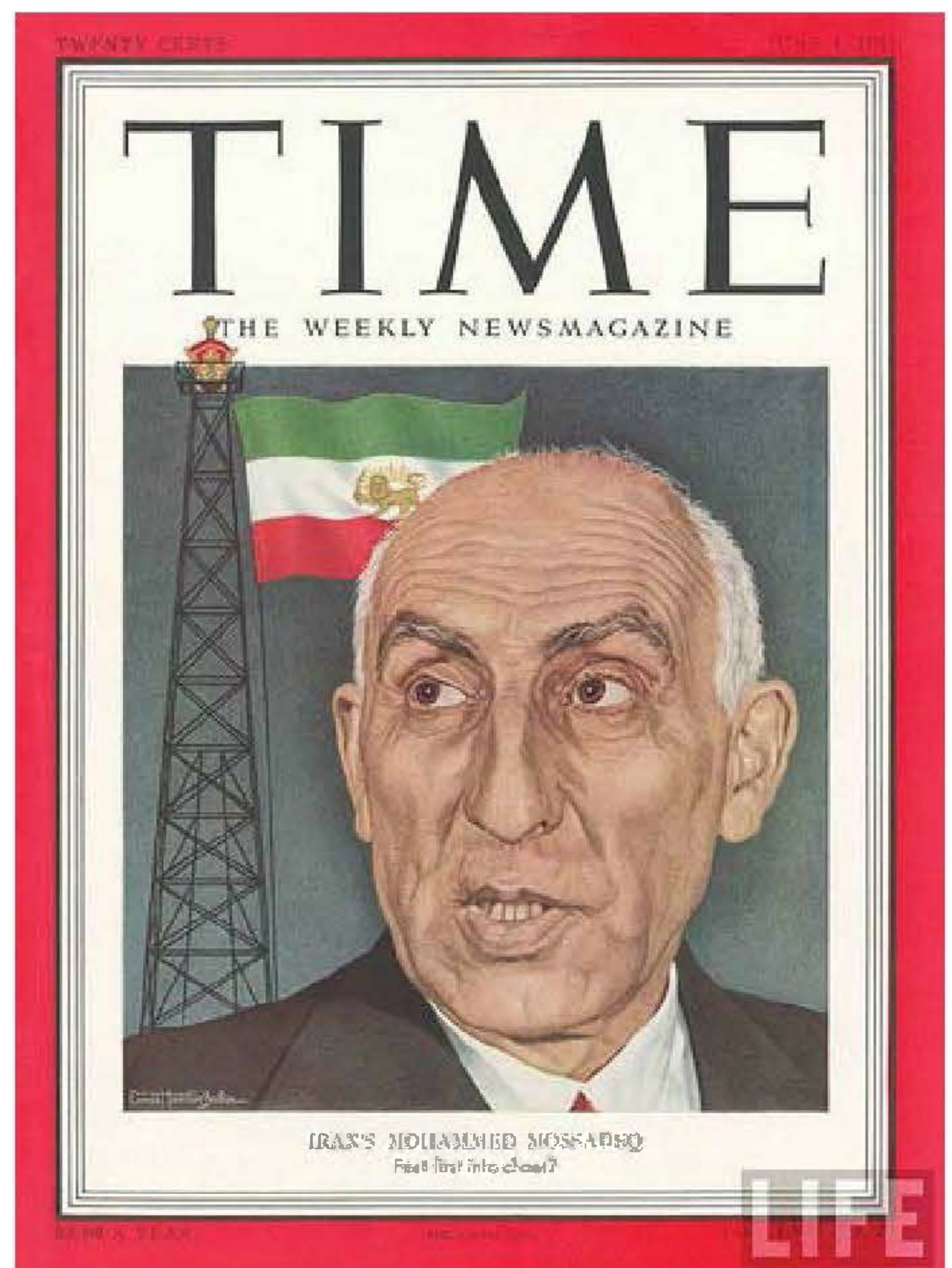
EISENHOWER

Of particular relevance to the Middle East was the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower, where Washington sought to bolster anti-communist, Muslim-majority governments resistant to Communism. The region was a main

theater of Cold War activity during the 1950s, with Iran playing a central role. In 1951, Mohammad Mossadegh was democratically elected as the prime minister of Iran and set about nationalizing the Iranian oil industry from its British owners. An attempt to oust Mossadegh by the Iranian Royal Court failed when millions came to the streets across Iran in July 1952, forcing Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to flee Iran. In 1953, the British convinced the Eisenhower administration of Mossadegh's socialist tendencies and the two countries used covert action to depose the Iranian Prime Minister and return Pahlavi back to the throne.

Rather than reaching out to the Iranian people, London and Washington engaged with authoritarian expatriate Iranians, brought them to power, and kept them there until the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

The authoritarianism of the Shah and the U.S. role in his coming to power would have far reaching implications for American-Iranian relations. Neither the British nor the Americans paid due regard to the domestic politics of Iranian democracy. This failure came back to haunt the allies in the form of hostility from the Iranian people that lasted until excesses of revolutionary Iran made the regime more of an enemy than the allies.



Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh on the cover of Time Magazine in 1951. Because of his nationalization of Iran's oil industry, Great Britain and the United States orchestrated a coup that ushered in rule by the Shah of Iran.

Although Eisenhower used the language of democracy, he favored stability at its expense.

CARTER

Eisenhower's successors continued a more or less robust policy of containment until President Carter initially rejected the urgency of containment, saying, "We are now free of that inordinate fear of Communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear."¹ Carter sought to increase the role of human rights in the American approach to Iran, but he deemphasized this integral part of democracy after U.S. intelligence detected a Soviet command-post exercise for invasion of Iran.² As a result, Carter reverted to anti-Communism rhetoric, shifted from encouraging the Shah to respect human rights, and emphasized deterring the Soviet Union.

So by 1980, Carter extended containment in the Middle East, in what became known as the Carter doctrine: "An attempt by any outside force [the USSR] to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."³ Just as Eisenhower favored

stability over democracy, so did Carter at the end of the day. Both presidents traded off democratic values for stability.

REAGAN

President Reagan dramatically expanded on the comparatively tepid containment strategy of Carter. The Reagan doctrine was a dynamic alternative to the static containment approach of his predecessors. Reagan supported anticommunist "freedom fighters" in countries like Afghanistan and Nicaragua to roll back Communism.

The Reagan doctrine provided covert assistance to a proxy army against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. In doing so, he showed his ability to take advantage of Afghan domestic politics and avoid having to use American military forces. Reagan did not push for democratization of Afghanistan, and like Eisenhower, Reagan only used the rhetoric of democracy to legitimize American military assistance. In his 1985 State of the Union address, President Reagan called upon the American people to stand with those who fought against the Soviet Union, what he had previously called the Evil Empire:

We must stand by all our democratic allies. And we must not break faith with those who are risking their lives



Afghan Mujahedeen became de facto U.S. proxies against the Soviet Union during the Reagan administration.

on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth.⁴

Although employing the rhetoric of democracy, the Reagan administration downplayed human rights and democracy for the Iranian people. It secretly provided arms to the regime in what then-Secretary of State George Shultz called a “hostage bazaar,” which later became known as the Iran-Contra affair. By aiding the

regime and ignoring the Iranian people, the Reagan administration set the stage for increased hostility from the people yet earned the scorn of the regime. Reaching out to the Iranian regime failed to achieve the desired goal of containment and only further alienated the Iranian people from the United States.

To his credit, Reagan’s European deterrence and human rights policies helped bring down the Soviet Union under his successor, President George

Herbert Walker Bush; international security concerns then shifted away from proxy conflict between the two superpowers toward “rogue regimes.” They were kept outside the international system because of their non-adherence to the rules of the game, such as inhumane treatment of their populations, practice of international terrorism, and lack of adherence to nuclear nonproliferation.⁵

CLINTON

Because there was not a single overarching threat to characterize the post-Cold War era until September 11, 2001, humanitarian and trade initiatives vied with national security issues for predominance in U.S. foreign policy.

President Bill Clinton invested much foreign policy energy in resolving regional disputes in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and the Arab-Israel dispute. Regarding Iran and Iraq, the Clinton administration is most known for its policy of dual containment. Before the 1979 Islamist Revolution, the United States had backed the Shah of Iran to balance Iraq. Throughout the 1980s, the Reagan administration had pursued a policy of support to Iraq to balance the Islamist regime in Iran. Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and the First Gulf War



Former President (1993-2001) Bill Clinton

that ensued necessitated a reevaluation of the balancing approach.

Dual containment sought to isolate both Iran and Iraq from the international system. Such a policy was made possible because of strategic parity established between Iran and Iraq as a result of the war between them that lasted from 1980 to 1988. Both were so weakened that they could be simultaneously contained without risking that either could overtake the other.⁶



Former Iranian President (1997-2005)
Mohammad Khatami.

Clinton's second term, however, was characterized by more outreach to Tehran than to Baghdad. Though the nuclear issue was not on the table at the time, Washington sought rapprochement with Tehran to end the Iranian regime's support for terrorism and dedication to the destruction of Israel.

The election of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami during May 1997 was the impetus for the many

concessions made by the United States to Iran. Khatami came into office promising to be more responsive to young Iranians and to begin a "dialogue of civilizations" with the United States. The Clinton administration hoped, in vain, that Khatami would bring reform and change to Iran, and that he would be a forthcoming diplomatic partner.

Table I depicts several steps the Clinton administration took toward building

TABLE I

CLINTON ADMINISTRATION CONCESSIONS TO GOVERNMENT OF IRAN	
1. STATE DEPARTMENT DROPS SANCTION THREAT AGAINST TURKEY FOR USING IRANIAN PIPELINE TO TRANSPORT GAS FROM TURKMENISTAN	JULY 1997
2. MUJAHEDDEEN-E KHALQ DESIGNATED AS FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION	OCTOBER 1997
3. CLINTON AND ALBRIGHT OFFER IRAN “ROADMAP” TO “GENUINE RECONCILIATION”	JUNE 1998
4. “WRESTLING DIPLOMACY” OVERTURES ALLOW IRANIAN ATHLETES TO ENTER THE UNITED STATES WITHOUT FINGERPRINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHING	JULY 1998
5. IRAN REMOVED FROM STATE DEPARTMENT LIST OF MAJOR NARCOTICS PRODUCERS	DECEMBER 1998
6. CLINTON SIDETRACKS INVESTIGATION SHOWING IRAN SPONSORED KHOBAR TOWERS ATTACKS	ONGOING 1996-
7. UNITED STATES DROPS DESIGNATION OF IRAN AS “LEADING” STATE SPONSOR OF TERROR	APRIL 1999
8. NATIONAL COUNCIL OF RESISTANCE OF IRAN PLACED ON U.S. TERRORIST LIST	OCTOBER 1999
9. ALBRIGHT APOLOGIZES FOR U.S. ROLE IN 1953 COUP AGAINST IRAN	MARCH 2000
10. U.S. SANCTIONS ON PISTACHIOS, CAVIAR, AND CARPETS REMOVED	MARCH 2000
11. IRAN NO LONGER REFERRED TO AS A “ROGUE STATE” BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT	JUNE 2000
12. CLINTON AND ALBRIGHT ATTEND KHATAMI’S SPEECH AT THE UNITED NATIONS	SEPTEMBER 2000

a bridge to Khatami. During 1997, the State Department waived the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act to allow Turkey to use an Iranian pipeline to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan.

One of the most significant concessions the United States made to Iran was placing the Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK) on the State Department Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) list during October 1997. Iran had long pressured foreign governments to designate the MEK a terrorist organization. The United States hoped that such designation would bolster Khatami's position against Iranian hardliners.⁷ In designating the MEK as a terrorist organization, Washington chose engagement with the regime over reaching out to the Iranian people.

The United States followed up the designation by extending another olive branch to Iran. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright expressed her desire to establish a "very different relationship" with Iran and pursue "genuine reconciliation."⁸ Although Khatami did not immediately respond to this gesture, the state controlled radio of Iran quickly rebuffed these advances, calling them "inadequate." That broadcast declared the United States must end support for Iranian opposition groups, free frozen

Iranian assets, renounce violence against Iran, and "apologize to the Iranian nation for its wrong policies in the past fifty years."⁹

Over the course of the next two years, the Clinton administration made significant unilateral efforts to comply with Iranian demands. In 1998, the United States undertook what became known as "wrestling diplomacy" and removed travel restrictions on Iranian athletes to satisfy complaints of Iranian "hardliners." The United States also reached out to Iran by removing it from the list of major narcotics producers and dropping the designation of Iran as the "leading" state sponsor of terror in 1999.

During this time, the Clinton Administration also sought to prevent any flareups in Iranian-American relations. Despite Clinton's promise that "no stone would be left unturned" in the investigation into the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia, FBI director Louis Freeh publicly complained that the President deliberately ignored evidence that Iran was directly responsible for these attacks.¹⁰

By appeasing the regime, the Clinton team set back democratic change in Iran. But in doing so, the administration did not deter Iran from enriching uranium or

supporting international terrorism.

In October 1999, the United States fulfilled one of the four demands made by Iran in response to Secretary Albright's speech by placing the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) on the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list. Six months later, the United States fulfilled another of Iran's demands when Secretary Albright publicly apologized for the role of the United States in the overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh in 1953. The Clinton team followed up its words with actions by removing sanctions on Iranian carpets, pistachios, and caviar, allowing them to enter the United States, to the advantage of Tehran.

In June 2000, the State Department declared Iran would no longer be referred to as a "rogue state." In the past, moreover, U.S. officials had avoided being present during speeches or resolutions given by Iranian representatives at the United Nations to protest the regime's behavior. Washington had carried out this practice in 1987, when American delegates walked out of a speech by then Iranian President Ali Khamenei to protest Iran's violations of international law.¹¹ This pattern was still common practice with other "outlaw regimes" as of 2003, when a U.S. delegation walked

out of a Security Council meeting as Iraq's ambassador excoriated the United States.¹² In 2000, however, Secretary Albright and President Clinton made a point to be present during Khatami's speech at the United Nations, a significant diplomatic gesture.

Not only did such engagement fail to discourage Iran from terrorist activity, Iran's clandestine nuclear program continued apace. Again, trading off democracy for engagement failed to produce progress for either.

GEORGE W. BUSH DOCTRINE

The George W. Bush approach to Iran and the region can be understood in the context of the September 11, 2001 attacks. The Bush administration evaluated the threat from radical Islamists as equivalent to the danger of fascism during the interwar years and Communism during the Cold War.¹³ As with the Reagan doctrine, the grand strategy fashioned by George W. Bush after 9/11 sought to roll back enemies as much as deter and contain them. Such rollback consisted of preempting hostile state and nonstate entities that engage in proliferation and/or sponsor terrorism. To this end, Bush explicitly brought about regime change by toppling the Taliban in



September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City.

Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

Although President Bush paid attention to what he believed to be an “Iraqi opposition,” his administration’s mistake was assuming that it could create dissenters from scratch. Because Saddam Hussein had eliminated his opposition within Iraq, there was none there to be the focus of an American policy that sought to engage with the people of Iraq. The Bush administration chose to work with Iraqis in exile with little following inside Iraq, such as Ahmad Chalabi, who emerged again in 2010 in his quest for power.¹⁴ In contrast to Iraq, however, there are legitimate oppositionists within and outside of Iran on which an American policy of internal regime change might be based.

The use of military force to bring down Saddam Hussein in 2003 was an outcome

of the lack of legitimate dissenters within or outside of Iraq on which to bring about regime change from within. With the winds of 9/11 at his back, George W. Bush began the broadest reformulation of U.S. grand strategy since World War II. This revision would justify a policy of external regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq. As Roosevelt’s reevaluation of the U.S. role in the world came as a result of the shock of Pearl Harbor, President Bush’s strategic shift was precipitated by the shock of 9/11. This distress may have been even greater because the attacks occurred against civilian targets on the mainland of America, as opposed to the attacks on military installations in Hawaii in 1941.

The relative peace of the post-Cold War era for America was dramatically broken on September 11, when it was made

clear both to the Bush administration and the American population that the United States was not only threatened in the far corners of the Earth, but within its own territory. The case of 9/11 rendered irrelevant the multiple strategic reassessments occurring at the time and formed the basis for a radically new grand strategy that was a sharp departure from the modest foreign policy goals on which then-Governor Bush had campaigned—the outcome was the Bush doctrine.

Before 9/11, terrorism was a tactic used by groups to achieve a political end by calibrating their violence to avoid a complete public backlash, but the 9/11 attacks were carried out by a religiously-inspired enemy willing to kill unlimited numbers of civilians. When such radical intentions are combined with the existence of rogue nations hostile to the United States and supposedly building weapons of mass destruction, the new threat of global terrorism was made even more urgent. As a result, the Bush administration used “rogue state” language more frequently to justify missile defense and mobilize allies in the war on terrorism. This approach of dividing the world into friends and enemies was in many ways a return to the ideologically-charged language of Ronald Reagan.¹⁵

The threat to the United States from Soviet nuclear weapons was much greater than that posed by the rogues of the early 21st Century; the latter, however, may actually be more dangerous because rogue leaders are unlikely to be as easily deterred as was the Soviet leadership.

Although 9/11 was the first time Islamist terrorism played a central role in shaping U.S. grand strategy, the theocrats in Iran initiated the confrontation between Islamism and the United States following the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

On 11 February 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini assumed office in Iran, riding high on the slogan “Death to America” and terrorist attacks on Americans by a variety of like-minded Islamists soon followed.¹⁶

The system of government established by Khomeini is best characterized as Islamist-fascist. It combines anti-American and anti-Israeli chants, Islamist theology, totalitarian government, and appeals for popular support by scapegoating ethnic and religious minorities.¹⁷ Khomeini’s Iran was organized in the Western state structure with an elected legislature and president, but, in fact, ruled by an exclusive, repressive few. In this sense, Iran is organized like the traditional Western fascism of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy.

One departure from Western fascism is the role of religion in shaping regime ideology. Furthermore, Tehran's political system is not only meant to shape all aspects of life in Iran, it is also meant to be exported and imposed upon the rest of the Muslim world. Thus, the Islamic Republic of Iran combines an unusually radical system of religious jurisprudence at home with a subversive effort to reclaim what Shiite Iranian theocrats consider their rightful position as leaders of the entire Muslim world, both Shiite and Sunni.

The shock of the 9/11 attacks and threat from a potential nexus of activity between radical Islamists and rogue regimes producing weapons of mass destruction brought about a grand strategy that before 9/11 few would have thought possible. To guard against a second 9/11 or prevent an even more deadly attack with weapons of mass destruction, President Bush emphasized preemption: The United States will act, either in concert or alone, to neutralize threats to its security before they can fully materialize.

The Bush doctrine was put forth in the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, and has four principal components.

- First, preemptive military action against hostile states and terrorist organizations
- Second, maintenance of American military primacy
- Third, commitment to multilateralism but the United States would act unilaterally if circumstances warranted
- Fourth, the goal of promoting democracy and human rights¹⁸



Former President (2001-2009) George W. Bush.

The most radical departure from previous policy in the Bush doctrine is the presumption of a U.S. right to “anticipatory self-defense” (preemption) and the imperative to spread democracy, sometimes by force. These features essentially reject “realism,” which holds that states should be dealt with as they exist and discourages regime change policies. The Bush doctrine also relegates diplomacy to a secondary role, espousing unilateralism.

The Bush doctrine was most vividly on display in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although the Taliban was not directly responsible for 9/11, that extremist movement then running Afghanistan was responsible for giving al Qaeda the space and security from which to launch the 9/11 attacks. In the Bush doctrine formulation, a Taliban regime sheltering al Qaeda and unwilling to cooperate with the international community is a valid target for regime change. And in Iraq, Saddam Hussein’s supposed pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and history of working with terrorist organizations made him a valid target for “anticipatory self-defense,” with or without explicit United Nations authorization.

Moreover, Bush flirted with a regime change policy for Iran, announcing that

as the Iranian people “stand for liberty,” the United States would stand with them in his 2005 State of the Union Address.¹⁹ But such tough language against the legitimacy of the Iranian regime and solidarity with the Iranian people made no reappearance in future addresses, leaving the Bush administration well short of a regime change policy.

In fact, despite the Clinton administration’s failure to win any significant concessions from Tehran, the Bush team continued making conciliatory gestures to the regime.

During summer 2001, the Bush administration attempted to shorten the renewal period for the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act to two years, but was unable to get the change through Congress. Richard Haass, then Director for Policy Planning at the State Department, argued at the time for allowing Iran to apply for membership to the World Trade organization, but he was ultimately overruled.²⁰

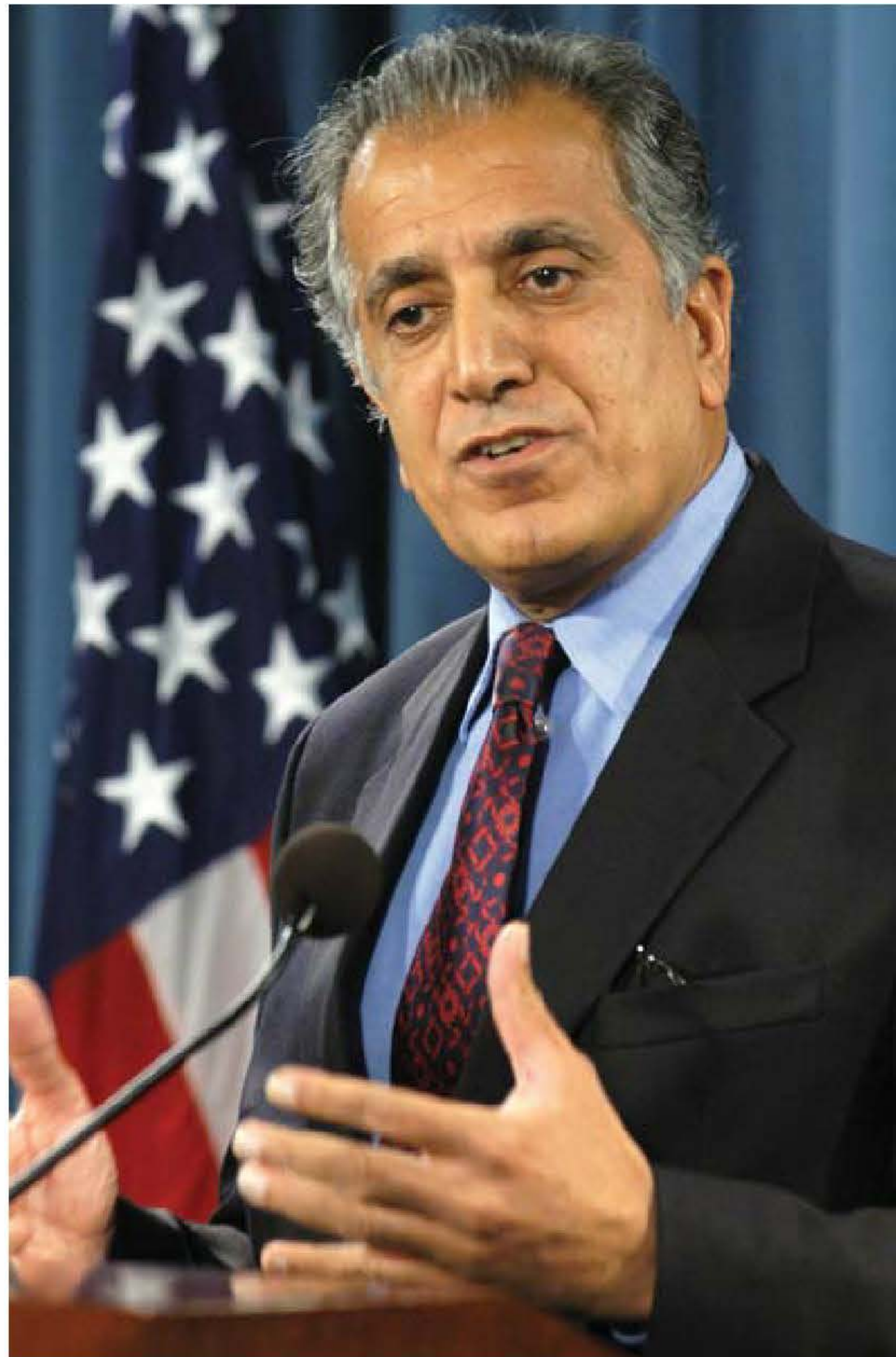
In late 2002, Zalmay Khalilzad, then Special Assistant to the President and later Ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq, met with Iranian representatives in Geneva.²¹ A purpose of this meeting was to negotiate a deal with Iran that would require any U.S. pilots downed over Iran

TABLE 2	
GEORGE W. BUSH ADMINISTRATION CONCESSIONS TO GOVERNMENT OF IRAN	
1. FBI ARRESTS 7 MEK SUPPORTERS IN LOS ANGELES FOR PROVIDING MATERIAL SUPPORT TO THE ORGANIZATION	FEBRUARY 2001
2. KHALILZAD MEETS WITH IRANIAN REPRESENTATIVES IN GENEVA TO DISCUSS IRAQ	LATE 2002
3. U.S. BOMBS MEK BASES IN IRAQ DURING OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM	APRIL 2003
4. U.S. MILITARY “VOLUNTARILY” DISARMS MEK FORCES IN IRAQ	MAY 2003
5. POWELL INFORMS RUMSFELD THAT THE MEK ARE “CAPTIVES, NOT ALLIES”	MAY 2003
6. DOUGLAS FEITH CALLS MEK A “TERRORIST ORGANIZATION”	JUNE 2003
7. CLOSURE OF NCRI-US AND MEK OFFICES BY STATE DEPARTMENT	AUGUST 2003
8. UNITED STATES PROMISES NOT TO OPPOSE IRAN’S ENTRY INTO THE WTO	MARCH 2005
9. UNITED STATES AUTHORIZES EU-3 TO OFFER BOEING SPARE PARTS AS A CARROT IN NEGOTIATIONS	MARCH 2005
10. KHALILZAD AUTHORIZED TO MEET WITH IRANIAN OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS IRAQ	LATE 2005
11. STATE DEPARTMENT CONSIDERS OPENING INTERESTS SECTION IN TEHRAN	LATE 2005
12. UNITED STATES OFFERS TO PARTICIPATE IN P5+1 NEGOTIATION IF ENRICHMENT IS HALTED	MAY 2006
13. SERIES OF MEETINGS BETWEEN U.S. AND IRANIAN OFFICIALS IN BAGHDAD	MARCH-AUGUST 2007
14. KHALILZAD ATTENDS MULTILATERAL MEETING WITH IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER (UNAUTHORIZED)	JANUARY 2008
15. UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE BURNS ATTENDS E3+3 MEETING WITH IRAN’S NUCLEAR NEGOTIATOR	JULY 2008
16. SECRETARY RICE MAINTAINS MEK ON THE FTO LIST DESPITE LACK OF EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE DESIGNATION	JANUARY 2009

during the anticipated invasion of Iraq to be returned to American custody. In return, Tehran demanded that the U.S. attack MEK bases in Iraq.

At the request of Tehran, the United States bombed MEK bases in Iraq during 2003.²² David Cloud of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote, “The dismantling of the Iranian opposition force in Iraq, known as the Mujahedin-e-Khalq, or MEK, fulfills a private U.S. assurance conveyed to Iranian officials before the start of hostilities that the group would be targeted by British and American forces if Iran stayed out of the fight, according to U.S. officials. The effort was part of broader strategy aimed at reassuring Tehran that the war in neighboring Iraq held out the prospect of benefits, the officials said.”²³ In May 2003, the MEK was “voluntarily” disarmed. Nick Horden of the *Australian Financial Review* said, “The second Gulf War and the Geneva deal appear to have spelt the end for the Mujahedin, a longstanding thorn in Tehran’s side... The departure of the Mujahedin from the scene is a tangible benefit to Iran of co-operating with the U.S.”²⁴

In the aftermath of the U.S. bombing of MEK bases in Iraq, several members of the U.S. military came forward in support



Zalmay Khalilzad, former Special Assistant to the President and Ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq.

of that organization, prompting Secretary of State Colin Powell to inform Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld that MEK members were “captives, not allies.”²⁵ Consistent with Powell’s position, Douglas Feith, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy,

stated during a press conference that, “We view the MEK as a terrorist organization and are treating it as such.”²⁶

Despite the fact that the National Council of Resistance of Iran–US Representative Office had revealed key components of Iran’s secret nuclear program in the period of 2002-2003, such as the Natanz uranium enrichment site and Arak Heavy Water Facility, the United States moved forward with its commitment to the regime to clamp down on its primary Iranian opposition. When Secretary Powell was questioned on 1 August 2003 regarding reports that the Iranians were willing to “turn over some senior al-Qaida people that they have, but they would in turn want us to take further action against the MEK,” he responded, “we are in touch with the Iranians on both of these issues... We’ll wait and see.”²⁷

Only two weeks later, as the keystone of its commitment to crack down on the Iranian opposition, the State Department designated the NCRI-US a foreign terrorist organization, closed its office, and that of MEK, and froze their assets. Meeting this longstanding demand of the regime slowed the flow of revelations about Iran’s nuclear program, appeased the Iranian regime, and stalled the process of Iranian democratization.



Former Secretary of State Colin Powell

Tehran also requested from Zalmay Khalilzad that MEK members in Iraq be swapped with Tehran in exchange for al Qaeda members in Iran, a deal Washington was unwilling to make. There was serious division within the administration over how to handle the

MEK. National Security Advisor Rice wanted to treat the group as a terrorist organization, while Deputy Secretary of State Armitage and Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz believed the MEK could be useful in gaining leverage over Tehran.²⁸

After 2002, at the same time concessions regarding Iranian opposition groups were being made to the Iranian regime, increasing pressure was also applied on Tehran, mainly concerning Iran's uranium enrichment activities. The Treasury and State Departments steadily ratcheted up sanctions against Iranian regime organizations and individuals involved in nuclear proliferation or missile development; meanwhile, the Bush administration slowed down the pace of additional explicit bilateral engagement actions, absent a suspension of Iran's enrichment activities.

Iran temporarily suspended enrichment in 2003, perhaps as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and to move enrichment facilities to a more secure underground location; without sufficient leverage via the Iranian opposition the Bush approach was also doomed to fail in inducing long term compliance.

Though it seems to have never been seriously considered by the White House

and State, during May 2003 proposals for high level bilateral discussions between Washington and Tehran were floated via Swiss interlocutors. Among the six areas of concern cited by the Iranian regime was that the United States crack down on the MEK in Iraq.²⁹

Amidst growing concern over Iran's nuclear program during 2005, President Bush extended a flurry of concessions to the Iranian regime. Washington would not veto future entry by Iran into the World Trade Organization. In addition, the United States authorized the European Union to offer Boeing spare parts in nuclear negotiations. Iran had been unable to obtain these parts for its aging fleet of civilian American-made aircraft because of existing U.S. trade sanctions.

And in late 2005, Khalilzad was authorized to negotiate with Iranian officials regarding stabilization of Iraq, though his Iranian counterparts failed to show. At the same time, the State Department was considering opening an Interests Section in Tehran. Then in early 2006, the White House agreed to sit in on negotiations with the Iranian regime over the nuclear program in the company of European allies if Iran halted enrichment.³⁰



From left to right: former Iranian nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani, former High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union Javier Solana, and Iranian nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili.

During June 2008, Iran responded to the Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) offer of talks with a “comprehensive” negotiation package that included everything but uranium enrichment: security, terrorism, narcotics, organized crime, and illegal migrants.

In a meeting between Iran and the P5+1, at which Under Secretary of State William Burns represented the United States without formally participating or

making a statement after the meetings, talks predictably deteriorated. The P5+1 demanded cessation of uranium enrichment before proceeding with a suspension of further economic sanctions—a “freeze-for-freeze” proposal, which Iran flatly refused. Such was the last serious effort at regime outreach by the Bush administration.

Indeed, rather than making progress in slowing down Iran’s march toward a nuclear weapon, the Bush administration

handed off to the Obama administration a situation where it seemed as likely as ever that the United States would have to choose between military strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities or attempting to contain and deter a nuclear-armed Iran through making additional threats and/or granting even more concessions. Deterring the Iranian effort from uranium enrichment had failed, as did the rhetorical effort to reach out to the Iranian people. Instead of reaching out to the people, Secretary Rice maintained the terrorist listing of the main Iranian opposition groups in January 2009.

Rather than focusing on diplomatic engagement to produce unlikely Iranian concessions in the nuclear arena, an alternative approach would be to engage the regime to buy time and encourage internal regime change by the opposition. But wrapping Western arms around the Iranian opposition with widespread support is bound to choke it; rather, coordination of dissidents within Iran with expatriates outside the country would yield dividends, such as leadership and financing from émigré Iranians for the Iranian street, with less risk.

Because Tehran uses allegations of U.S. funding as a justification for persecuting its domestic opponents, Akbar Ganji

argues, “Iranians themselves must support the transition to democracy,” and expatriate Iranians can assist the transition to democracy with funding.³¹ Such an approach to undermine the regime from within, however, would mean engagement on Western terms, without ignoring Tehran’s human rights violations or terrorism in its neighborhood.³²

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Since the Iranian Revolution, American presidents have been stuck on the horns of a false dichotomy between isolation and engagement to achieve containment. There is a tendency to follow these two policies while ignoring other potential routes. Presidents could combine engagement, isolation, and encouraging democratic change by reaching out to the Iranian people. Doing so would resolve the false dilemma and make containment moot for a democratic Iran.

American Presidents have alternated between policies of hostility and friendliness toward Tehran, sometimes pursued at the same time, with little effect on the behavior of the Iranian regime. Because of the ideological nature of that regime, its focus is on perpetuation of the Iranian Revolution

not on American priorities. Hence, isolation, engagement, or a combination of both does not produce compliance with American demands or desires.

As the regime looks within to survive, Tehran dismisses international dictates and appeals. Faced with stalled engagement, the international community imposes sanctions that do not threaten regime survival, and makes incredible threats of military action. Because survival is more important to the Iranian regime than any combination of positive and negative incentives, international policy must come to grips with Iran's organized opposition to keep the Iranian regime from going nuclear and bring democracy to Iran.

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CHAPTER 2

Engage; Isolate;
then What?

THE OBAMA DOCTRINE

If President Obama is to avoid the false dilemma between isolation and engagement faced by his predecessors, he would have to incorporate the Iranian opposition into his policies. The good news is that during early 2010, President Obama is beginning to pay attention to the Iranian opposition. The bad news is that the inclusion may be too little and too late to bring democracy to Iran and prevent it from becoming a nuclear-armed state.

The Obama administration's approach to the Middle East derives from a few principles of the President. They are interpreted with the assistance of officials in the think tank and academic communities. Three core beliefs characterize what may be called the Obama doctrine.

- First, the behavior of countries is more important than the nature of their governments or how they treat their own people.
- Second, even when behavior conflicts with U.S. interests or offends its ideals, the language of diplomatic engagement with states is preferable to the rhetoric of confrontation as a way to change the behavior of recalcitrant regimes.
- Third, if failed or failing states are

unable to prevent nonstate actors from conducting terrorist activities against the United States, its friends, or allies, Washington shall seek bilateral cooperation but reserves the right to take unilateral action within such states to defeat the nonstate actors.

The first two elements of the Obama doctrine, a focus on behavior rather than nature of governments and a preference for the rhetoric of engagement, differ sharply from the Bush doctrine. The Bush approach made democratization of authoritarian regimes, whether friend or foe, a priority, although implementation was not forthcoming.

And the Bush administration employed the rhetoric of “rogue regimes” to castigate the human rights abuses and international adventurism of regimes like those in Iran, North Korea, Iraq, and Syria. The Obama administration initially downplayed human rights abuses in Iran so as not to undermine diplomatic negotiations on the nuclear file. In general a core concern of an emerging Obama doctrine is “realpolitik,” which focuses on relations with traditional great powers, such as Russia, and places topics like human rights and democracy on the back burner.¹

President Obama's preferred course on Iran was to employ the language of



President Barack Obama

engagement, which was evidenced in his 2009 Nowruz message. As the diplomatic course cooled and street protests heated up in the second half of 2009, however, the rhetoric of administration officials grew more confrontational.

The third leg of the Obama doctrine represents continuity with the Bush administration. Both Presidents Bush and Obama have taken military action in countries like Pakistan to target nonstate

actors. Although the Taliban was running a state—Afghanistan—in 2001, it became a nonstate actor as a result of its defeat and was subsequently targeted by both administrations.

In a preview of President Obama's national security strategy during his May 2010 Commencement Address at West Point, he stressed multilateral engagement over unilateral use of force.² The Obama rhetoric contradicts that



Robert S. Ford, Obama administration nominee for the position of Ambassador to Syria



Syrian President Bashar al Assad.

of President George W. Bush, with less emphasis on unilateral American power and the right to wage preemptive military action.³ When translating words into deeds abroad, however, the Obama approach compares favorably with that of his predecessor.

To his credit, President Obama has negotiated bilateral cooperation from failing states like Yemen and a failed state, Somalia, to conduct covert operations against al Qaeda affiliates in those countries—al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen and al Shabaab in Somalia.

Even when the external behavior of a regime is odious, the Obama administration has been willing to make concessions to provide positive incentives for behavioral change. Consider the case of Syria. The United States reached out to Syria in 2010 without preconditions

by moving to return an American Ambassador to Damascus and sending other diplomats to engage the Syrian president in a diplomatic dialogue.⁴

There had not been a U.S. envoy since Syria was implicated in the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. Congressional criticism of reported shipments of Syrian SCUD surface-to-surface missiles to Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, likely with the quiet complicity of Iran, held up posting the envoy in summer 2010; nevertheless, the Obama administration seemed determined to reach out to Damascus.⁵

A rationale for engaging Syria is to wean Damascus from Tehran. Washington hoped to draw Syria away from Iran as well as from militant groups like Hezbollah and Hamas via diplomacy rather than just isolation. Indeed,

Secretary of State Clinton explicitly called upon Syria to pull away from its alignment with Iran. The Bush approach had been to isolate states like Syria from the international system to coerce a change in behavior.

The Obama administration began to return an American ambassador to Syria despite absence of a change in alignment of Damascus with Tehran. Indeed, rather than reducing ties with Iran, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad said in reply to Secretary Clinton's request that Syria cut off relations with Iran and stop supplying Hezbollah with weapons that Syria is not asking anyone's advice; moreover, Damascus would determine how to run its own affairs.⁶

To illustrate his resolve, Bashar announced a declaration that Iran and Syria would increase cooperation and abolish visa requirements between the two states. At a press conference with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in late February 2010, President Bashar said Damascus opposed efforts to prevent Tehran from obtaining nuclear energy for civilian purposes because Syria wanted such energy for itself. To top it off, Ahmadinejad said that Clinton's demand expressed American "annoyance," stated Iran's wish that the Americans would

"drop dead," and that a Middle East without Israel was a "divine promise."⁷

In the face of lack of results from his approach and unlike his predecessor, President Obama focuses on engagement with Arab states and nonstate actors to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even if there are short term problems in America's alignment with Israel.⁸

ENGAGE FIRST: WHAT NEXT?

Although committed to diplomacy to resolve differences, the Iran policy of the Obama administration is up for grabs during summer 2010. Since events following the 12 June 2009 election in Iran, the regime is even less likely to be responsive to engagement. The hard line taken by Tehran, out of fear that any retreat would result in collapse, makes it difficult to reach a deal with the major powers about nuclear issues. With the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) reinforcing the clerical leadership of Supreme Leader Khamenei, any negotiation with the West buys time to expand Iran's stock of uranium, some of which is being enriched to 20 percent purity, increase the number of centrifuges at the Natanz enrichment facility, as well as create new/covert enrichment facilities. President Obama's expressed



President Obama during his June 2009 address at the American University of Cairo.

commitment to engage the Iranian regime coincides with his outreach to the Muslim world in general. In his 2009 Cairo speech, President Obama walked a fine line of excoriating Muslim extremists while wooing the Muslim center. His speech was replete with soaring rhetoric designed to reach out to Muslims around the globe, and particularly those in the Arab world. The president remarked that now is “a time of great tension between the United States and

Muslims around the world.” He stated that a source of tension is the rights and responsibilities of nations on nuclear weapons. Regarding such arms and Iran, the Cairo speech stated that:

This issue has been a source of tension between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. For many years, Iran has defined itself in part by its opposition to my country, and there is in fact a tumultuous history between us.



President Obama and Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a May 2009 meeting in Washington.

In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians. This history is well known. Rather than remain trapped in the past, I've made it clear to Iran's leaders and people that my country is prepared to move forward.⁹

But while Iran has a touchy relationship with most Arab countries, its relationship with Egypt may be the most bitter. Egypt does not post an ambassador to Tehran.¹⁰ Nevertheless, perhaps as an expression of his commitment to engage Iran, President Obama used his Cairo address to reaffirm his resolve of reaching out to Tehran.

Another illustration of President Obama's dedication to a strategy of diplomacy to rein in the efforts of the Iranian regime to become a nuclear weapons state is in his



Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki.

17 May 2009 press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The President stated that the United States was engaged in a process to reach out to Iran, persuade Tehran that it is not in its interest to obtain nuclear weapons, and convince Iran to change course: “But I assured the Prime Minister that we are not foreclosing a range of steps, including much stronger international sanctions, in assuring that Iran understands that we are serious.”¹¹

It would not be unreasonable to interpret

the President’s “range of steps” to imply he is leaving “all options on the table,” presumably including military alternatives. But the plan to reach out to Iran during 2009 coupled with an ambiguous threat of a “range of steps” if talks fail has not provided enough leverage to coerce Iran to cease its quest for the bomb as of summer 2010.

Regarding Tehran’s progress toward nuclear weapons status, consider a 19 February 2009 International Atomic

Energy Agency (IAEA) report.¹² It states that Iran had produced 1,010 kilograms (2,227 pounds) of low enriched uranium hexafluoride, enough that if enriched to weapons grade, could fuel one nuclear weapon. In this respect, the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) holds that Iran has already reached “break-out” capability.¹³

However, unless Iran has covert enrichment facilities, any diversion of its low enriched uranium stocks at Natanz for further enrichment should be detected by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors.

Writing about the nuclear talks, on 11 July 2009, the *Wall Street Journal* reported, “Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said that Tehran had begun work on new proposals that will be put forward as a basis of discussion with the West, according to state media. He didn’t detail the proposals, nor did he say whether any part of the package would deal specifically with Iran’s nuclear program.”

The *Journal* reporter interpreted the Mottaki statement not as a ploy to buy time, change the subject, or give the false appearance that moderates were on the ascendency, but as “a tentative signal that Tehran may be willing to start rebuilding

relations after weeks of drubbing the U.S., Britain and other Western power [sic] for alleged complicity in election unrest.”¹⁴ Rather, such empty offers are an effective distraction from unrest and designed to give the regime an air of legitimacy through negotiation with the international community.

Evidence of the emptiness of the Iranian offer is that on 14 June 2008, the same Foreign Minister Mottaki said he would offer to the visiting European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana a “comprehensive” negotiation package of security, terrorism, narcotics, organized crime, and illegal migrants, which omits the regime’s nuclear file.

In the subsequent Geneva meeting between Iran and the Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council plus Germany, talks deteriorated over the suspension of uranium enrichment; the P5+1 again insisted on cessation, but Iran refused.¹⁵

Since Mottaki’s hint of a “comprehensive” offer, the Iranian regime has succeeded in expanding its stocks of enriched uranium and reinforced Revolutionary Guards rule by its clerical allies.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also got in on the game of using arms control rhetoric as a ploy. On 15 April

2009, during the presidential election campaign, the Iranian Student's News Agency (ISNA) reported him to have stated that Iran would offer a new proposal package for nuclear talks.¹⁶

And *Bloomberg* reported on 26 April 2009 that Ahmadinejad was preparing to offer the U.S. and European nations an updated version of a one-year-old proposal for talks about its nuclear program. "We are reconsidering our proposed package," Ahmadinejad said in an interview on American ABC television.¹⁷

Such "reconsideration" came as Ahmadinejad was facing pressure from election rival Mousavi, who criticized Ahmadinejad's hard line stance on the nuclear program. Claiming that an Iranian proposal to the United States was in the offing was a gambit to give the appearance of moderation, both domestically and abroad, while continuing apace with uranium enrichment.

On 24 April 2009, the *Jerusalem Post* printed an *AP* wire service quote of Foreign Minister Mottaki, "We do believe that this new proposed package would be a very good base for mutual cooperation on the international level."¹⁸ Finally, Mottaki said on 13 May 2009 that Iran

was preparing a package of proposals for the P5+1 on the regime's nuclear activities and promised to deliver it as soon as it was finalized.¹⁹

Despite the cooperative implication of Mottaki's statements, the Iranian regime had begun testing more advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges at a pilot plant within the Natanz enrichment complex.²⁰

Tehran likely judged that the most effective method of buying time to enrich uranium is to enter a vague, drawn out, and insincere proposal-counterproposal cycle with the P5+1. As long as Iran appears somewhat engaged on the Obama initiative, especially the letter conveyed from President Obama to Ahmadinejad following the U.S. inauguration, the regime can delay Western military action against its nuclear infrastructure.²¹

When Tehran refused to accept a nuclear deal reached in Geneva during October 2009 that would have required Iran to ship some of its Low-Enriched Uranium (LEU) out of the country for processing into fuel for use in nuclear reactors, the sanctions wheels were set in motion.²² Iran's decision to enrich uranium to 20% purity is a substantial increase over the 3.5% enriched LEU Iran possessed as of



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad examining uranium enrichment centrifuges.

spring 2010. Coupled with the April 2010 unveiling of third generation uranium enrichment centrifuges, they increase the urgency of imposing the kinds of sanctions that might lead Tehran to reconsider its nuclear policy.²³

While previous “smart sanctions” targeted individuals and organizations involved in Iran’s nuclear, missile, and terrorist endeavors to disrupt their operations, the next round of UN sanctions was expected to target the Iranian economy to induce a reassessment by the Iranian leadership. Not since President Clinton’s 1995 Executive Orders (12957 and 12959) and the 1996 Iran-Libya Sanctions Act banning trade with and investment in Iran had Iran’s economy been targeted.²⁴

On 29 January 2010, the United States introduced a paper outlining a list of individuals and firms, mostly affiliated with Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, to add to the list already sanctioned by the UN Security Council.²⁵

Such sanctions would be an extension of the 27 November 2009 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution that expressed “serious concern that Iran has constructed an enrichment facility at Qom [Iran] in breach of its obligation to suspend all enrichment related activities.”²⁶

This censure of Tehran was preceded by a 16 November report that the IAEA suspects Iran may have additional hidden nuclear facilities beyond the previously undisclosed underground enrichment facility at Qom, revealed during October.²⁷

However it now appears that the fourth round of UN sanctions will fall into the “smart” category, further targeting Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and political elites; any “crippling” sanctions would almost certainly fall short of the necessary votes in the UN Security Council and would have to be pursued by the United States outside of the United Nations.

The Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) met on 16 January and agreed that Iran’s response to the latest proposal to ship LEU abroad was inadequate, but did not agree on sanctions.²⁸

During May 2010, Brazil and Turkey brokered a deal for Tehran to implement revised terms of the October 2009 fuel swap with the Vienna Group (United States, Russia, France, and the IAEA). Though the proposal was no doubt intended to forestall sanctions, the P5 immediately tabled a draft resolution for a fourth round of UN Security Council smart sanctions against Iran, designed to counter the fuel swap initiative.



From left to right: President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns.

The newest draft resolution would impose “smart sanctions” in the following areas: restrict Iranian banks from working abroad; target senior members of the Revolutionary Guards; and hinder Iranian shipping.²⁹

During 2010, a bipartisan Senate coalition called for the Obama administration to implement the “crippling sanctions” of which Secretary Clinton had previously spoken. A 27 January 2010 letter to

President Obama from the coalition of Senators states,

...you indicated that you wanted to see “serious movement” by the Iranians by the end of 2009...Now that this deadline has passed, we believe that it is imperative to put into action your pledge of increased, meaningful pressure against the Iranian regime-what Secretary Clinton called “crippling sanctions”...³⁰

And on 28 January 2010, the Senate passed an expanded version of a House bill that authorized the President to penalize companies that do business with Iran's petroleum sector. The Senate extended the possibility of such sanctions to companies doing business with Iran's telecommunications sector and proposed freezing of assets of Iranian regime officials.³¹

On 8 April, UN envoys of the P5+1 met in New York to discuss the next round of sanctions against Iran, which was remarkable because of China's participation.³² As they assembled, President Obama used the occasion of signing a new arms control agreement with Russia to discuss Iran sanctions with Russian President Medvedev in Prague. As the two heads of state met, Russian officials ruled out inclusion of sanctions on petroleum or gasoline in the UN package.³³

U.S. officials indicated that sanctions, which they hoped would pass during spring 2010, were not meant to bring about regime change and should not have a widespread economic impact on Iran.³⁴

Continuing to pursue an incremental approach, which has to date achieved no substantive movement from the Iranian regime on the nuclear file, is

unlikely to work in the future. On one hand, strong sanctions are almost always preferable to incremental ones; on the other hand, comprehensive sanctions that might be effective are almost always infeasible, because of an inability to win consensus.³⁵ This quandary is exactly the situation the United States faces.

Rounds 1-3

In the first set of UN sanctions addressing Iran's nuclear program, on 23 December 2006, Security Council Resolution 1737 targeted entities involved in Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. These included the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.³⁶ A high profile name was Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, Commander of the IRGC, whom the regime replaced as a result of the designation. This initial sanctions salvo was pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1696 of 31 July 2006, which demanded Iran cease enriching uranium.³⁷

On 9 January 2007, Treasury took aim at one of the main banks financing Iran's nuclear weapons program, Bank Sepah, by prohibiting all transactions between it and U.S. persons, as well as freezing any assets the bank holds in U.S. jurisdiction.³⁸

Because of the Iranian regime's continued refusal to comply with UN and IAEA

demands to halt uranium enrichment and ballistic missile programs, the Security Council followed Treasury's lead in a second resolution in March 2007. Resolution 1747 expanded the list of ballistic missile and nuclear entities to banks funding Iran's nuclear weapons program, including Bank Sepah. The Resolution also listed entities and individuals of the IRGC, including Qods Aeronautics Industries and Qods Force Commander Qasem Soleimani.³⁹ The Qods Force is the IRGC wing responsible for export of the 1979 Iranian Revolution via terrorism.

Again in late 2007, Treasury moved ahead of the UN in sanctioning additional Iranian entities; at the same time, State designated the IRGC as a terrorist organization and entity of proliferation concern. On 25 October 2007, Treasury cut off from the U.S. financial system Bank Melli and its subsidiaries, the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, IRGC and its leaders/subsidiaries, as well as several IRGC leaders.⁴⁰

Tehran's failure to comply with Resolutions 1737 and 1747 led to a third UN Resolution to extend sanctions on 3 March 2008—UNSCR 1803. It expanded the list of designated individuals and companies involved in Iran's nuclear and

missile programs.⁴¹ Initially, a November 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate judging Iran's nuclear weapons program to have ceased in 2003 undermined support for a new resolution.⁴² Ironically, an IAEA report on Iran's non-compliance with UN demands was harsher on the regime than was the U.S. Intelligence Community.

The next serious measure taken by either the United States or United Nations was Treasury's 6 November 2008 revocation of Iran's "U-Turn" license.⁴³ Prior to revocation, U.S. banks were allowed to process transactions that would benefit Iranian entities as long as the transaction passed through an American bank *from* a non-Iranian, non-U.S. financial institution *to* another offshore, non-Iranian, non-American financial institution.

Round 4

The next round of sanctions was anticipated to involve restricting Iran's imports of gasoline.⁴⁴ The economic impact of such restrictions, it was hoped, would change the strategic calculus of Iran's rulers. Even though these sanctions would have a small chance of success, they are still preferable relative to continuing the incremental approach.

UN sanctions having a general economic effect on Iran seem to be out of the

question as of summer 2010, and a fourth round of smart sanctions targeting individuals and entities depends on Russia and China. But, even if the UN Security Council approves such sanctions, they will be merely an incremental addition to the previous three rounds. And given the ineffectiveness of targeted sanctions to date, more of the same is unlikely to have an impact on the strategic calculations of the Iranian regime.

“Crippling” Sanctions

And even so-called crippling sanctions are insufficient alone. The success of sanctions centered on restriction of Iranian imports of refined petroleum depends on the degree of economic hardship and if it threatens the regime’s hold on the population; economic impact depends on whether Iran’s refined petroleum suppliers participate in sanctions.

According to the Energy Information Administration, as of 2008, Iran’s internal refining capacity is 1.5 million barrels per day (bbl/d), with plans to increase capacity to about 3 million bbl/d by 2012. As of spring 2010, consumers are allowed 32 gallons of gasoline per month at the 37 cents/gallon subsidized price. Of the approximately 400,000 bbl/d of gasoline

consumed, Iran imported about 94,000 bbl/d by the end of 2007.⁴⁵

Of importance among refined petroleum products is gasoline because of regime subsidies. In times of gasoline scarcity, Tehran faces a difficult decision between reducing subsidies to raise prices and depress demand or keeping scarce gasoline cheap and allowing pumps to run dry. Either choice is politically perilous. A substantial disruption in supplies of imported gasoline could precipitate riots and reinvigorate the Iranian opposition. During summer 2007, Tehran instituted limits on the amount of subsidized gasoline for purchase, resulting in riots at gas stations across the country.⁴⁶

Unilateral options for the United States to restrict such imports are limited because Washington already prohibits U.S. persons from conducting business with Iran, particularly in the oil and gas sector; it is doubtful that import denial via naval blockade is among options on the table for the Obama administration, although there is sentiment on Capitol Hill for blockade.

Unilateral steps short of blockade will have only a marginal impact. The Iran Sanctions Enabling Act of 2009, which passed the House and Senate during mid-October, would allow state and local governments to divest from companies



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

doing business with Iran's petroleum and natural gas sector.⁴⁷ But divestment is unlikely to compel corporations to cut ties with Iran.

The Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act of 2009 would have teeth, as it would authorize the President to deny U.S. government contracts to companies selling gasoline to Iran, and firms tangentially involved, such as shippers and those insuring tankers. Versions of the bill passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Senate Banking Committee.⁴⁸

Despite Reliance (of India) cutting off gasoline sales to Iran, it is doubtful that Royal Dutch Shell, Total, Lukoil, Zhuhai Zhenrong, or any of Iran's other gasoline suppliers would sacrifice lucrative contracts with Iran because of a threat of being cut off from U.S. government contracts.⁴⁹ Russia and China would lose economic investments in Iran if those countries participated in gasoline restrictions. That said, the toughly-worded resolution of 27 November "had unusual backing from Russia and China, broadening the message of international displeasure with Iran that is frequently voiced in the West."⁵⁰

Beijing is apparently sensitive to the argument that without support for a tough diplomatic stance against Tehran (perhaps including a fourth round of sanctions), Israel is likely to take military action that would interfere with Chinese supplies from Iran; the jury, however, is out whether China would vote for sanctions that target Iran's economy.⁵¹

The United States has reportedly persuaded the UAE and Saudi Arabia to surge oil exports to China in the event Iran cuts off oil exports in retaliation for Chinese participation in gasoline restrictions.⁵² Given Saudi dedication to oil price stability, however, it is unlikely

any surge in oil exports will be large enough to make up for China's loss of Iran as Beijing's number two supplier of oil.

Even if some of Iran's international suppliers were recruited to stop selling gasoline to Tehran, the regime has options to plug any supply gap. For one thing, the IRGC is heavily involved in smuggling goods, oil and gasoline included.⁵³

Venezuela has signed a deal with Tehran to supply 20,000 bbl/d of gasoline, which would help plug any shortfall created by sanctions.⁵⁴ If Russia so wished, it has enough excess refining capacity to plug the gasoline gap. And though there is always cause for skepticism about Iran's technical-industrial prowess in the petroleum sector, Iran's expansion of refining capacity to make the country self-sufficient in gasoline production could be in place by 2012, making import restrictions irrelevant: Any sanctions storm will only need to be weathered for about two years.⁵⁵

Given the Iranian regime's continued refusal to surrender its nuclear programs in response to economic incentives and threats, what Iranian President Ahmadinejad has characterized as "chocolate in exchange for gold," gasoline sanctions are unlikely to have enough impact to cause a strategic rethinking in

Tehran.⁵⁶ Not to say they should not be tried, because any economic pressure, even if it not decisive, is welcome. And producing consensus for a fourth round is useful in case force has to be used later.

THE WAR FOR WASHINGTON

In light of the stalemate in diplomacy with Iran, there is a war for Washington among four schools of thought on how to preclude a nuclear-armed Iran. This war is as important as one in the Middle East because of the important role played by think tanks in feeding ideas to like-minded allies within the U.S. government to shape how the Obama doctrine is applied to Iran.

The first school advocates expanding engagement with Iran: Negotiations have so far stalled only because the United States has not made sufficient concessions. These would include extraditing Iranian oppositionists based in Iraq back to Iran, providing Tehran a security guarantee, and accepting uranium enrichment on Iranian soil.

The second approach suggests continuing the Obama administration diplomatic and sanctions tracks, but acknowledges that chances of success are low. Members of this school turn their attention to how a nuclear-armed Iran

might be contained from employing or exporting nuclear arms, as well as from conventional aggression and increased coercion that would result from a nuclear weapons capability.

The third argues that failure of Obama's engagement policy and the surprising strength of protests following the 12 June 2009 Presidential election in Iran justify a U.S. policy of regime change for Iran.

The fourth approach concurs with the third: Diplomatic engagement has run its course and is extremely unlikely to stop Iran's nuclear program from reaching weapons status. But the fourth school believes the regime change clock is too slow to topple the regime before it achieves nuclear weapons status. Therefore, military strikes are the only remaining option for preventing Iran's nuclear program from yielding nuclear weapons. Such strikes should be taken as soon as possible because Iran is continuously upgrading its defensive military systems, dispersing its nuclear program, and hardening command and control sites.

The first school of thought is championed by Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett: The United States has been insufficiently serious in its diplomatic offers to Tehran. In

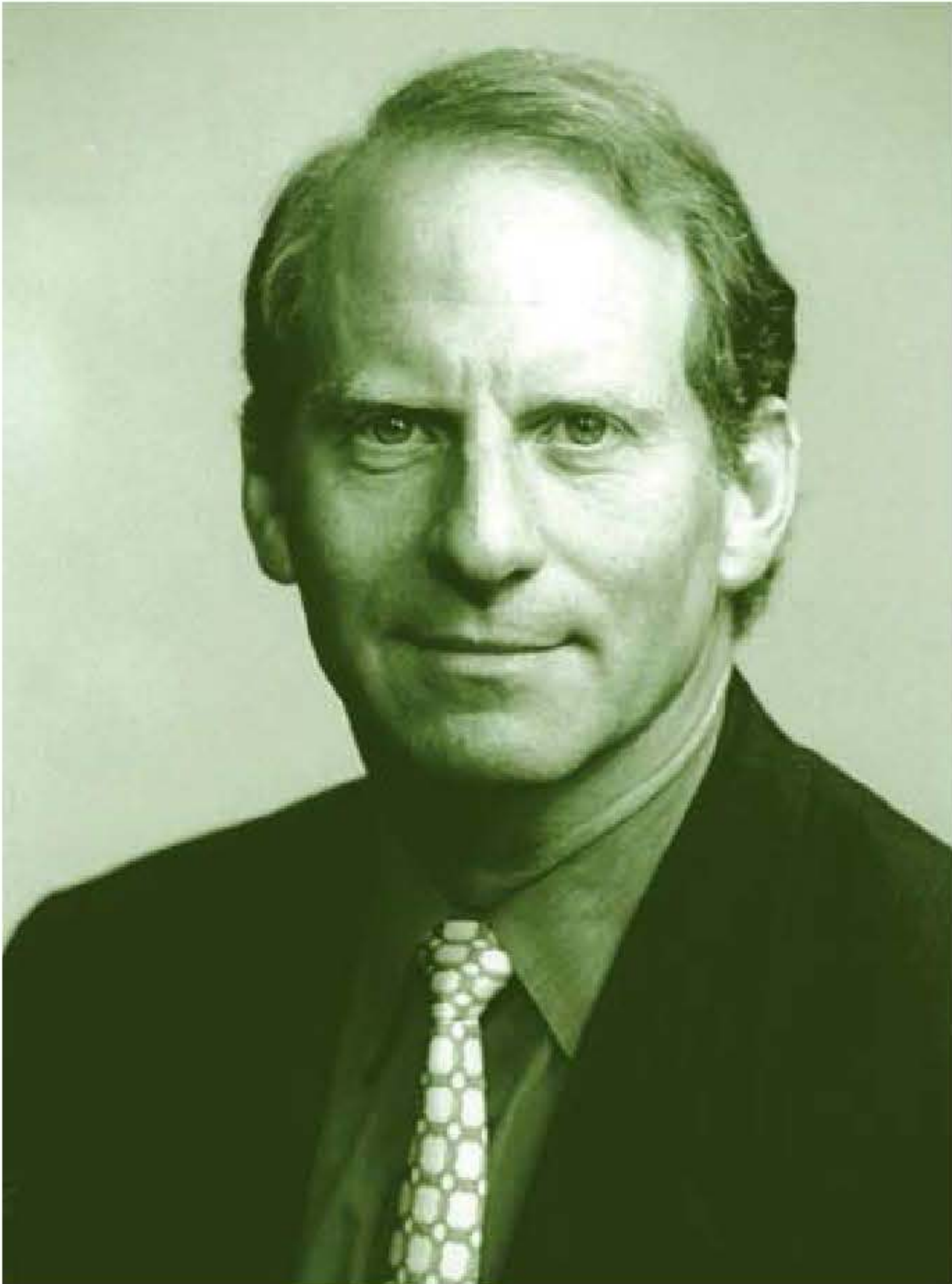
January 2010, the Leveretts argued, "Beyond the nuclear issue, the Obama Administration has declined to address Tehran's repeated expressions of interest in a 'comprehensive framework' for U.S.-Iranian negotiations." They go on to suggest that American policy in the Middle East cannot succeed unless the United States accedes to Iran's demands:

How [will] the United States... be able to achieve any of its high priority objectives in the Middle East – Arab-Israeli peace, post-conflict stabilization in Iraq and Afghanistan, curbing WMD proliferation, assuring adequate supplies of oil and natural gas from the Persian Gulf to international energy markets, etc. – without a more positive and productive relationship with the Islamic Republic?⁵⁷

Concurring with the Leveretts regarding the central role Iran plays in the Middle East, Ray Takeyh stated that:

Iran now lies at the center of the Middle East's major problems—from the civil wars unfolding in Iraq and Lebanon to the security challenge of the Persian Gulf and it is hard to imagine any of them being resolved without Tehran's cooperation.⁵⁸

The second school is typified by James



Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations

Lindsay and Ray Takeyh, who argue that although the diplomatic track has not succeeded and however unlikely it is to work, negotiations and sanctions are the best chance for stopping Iran short of enriching uranium to nuclear weapons fuel levels. Lindsay and Takeyh also believe that military strikes are too costly to be pursued at this stage, but that threat of such strikes is an essential element of a future containment policy against Iran:

Even if Washington fails to



Council on Foreign Relations Senior Vice President James M. Lindsay

prevent Iran from going nuclear, it can contain and mitigate the consequences of Iran's nuclear defiance. It should make clear to Tehran that acquiring the bomb will not produce the benefits it anticipates but isolate and weaken the regime. Washington will need to lay down clear "redlines" defining what it considers to be unacceptable behavior – and be willing to use military force if Tehran crosses them. It will also need to reassure its



Historian and foreign policy expert Robert Kagan

friends and allies in the Middle East that it remains firmly committed to preserving the balance of power in the region.⁵⁹

The third school is characterized by Richard Haass and also by Robert Kagan. They believe the chances of diplomatic breakthrough are now so small and the potential power of the Iranian street so promising as to warrant a U.S. policy of regime change. Haass is particularly relevant because he had been a staunch advocate of engagement with Tehran:



Middle East Forum director Daniel Pipes

I've changed my mind. The nuclear talks are going nowhere. The Iranians appear intent on developing the means to produce a nuclear weapon; there is no other explanation for the secret uranium-enrichment facility discovered near the holy city of Qum.

Fortunately, their nuclear program appears to have hit some technical snags, which puts off the need to decide whether to launch a preventive strike. Instead we should be focusing on another fact: Iran may

be closer to profound political change than at any time since the revolution that ousted the shah 30 years ago.⁶⁰

Robert Kagan suggests that President Obama could learn the value of a regime change policy from President Reagan's approach to the Soviet Union:

What is more likely: that Iran's present leadership will agree to give up its nuclear program or that these leaders will be toppled? A year ago [2009], the answer seemed obvious. There was little sign the Iranian people would ever rise up and demand change, no matter what the United States and other democratic nations did to help them. If the prospects for a deal on Tehran's nuclear program seemed remote, the prospects for regime change were even more remote.

These probabilities have shifted since June 12 [2009]. Now the odds of regime change are higher than the odds the present regime will ever agree to give up its nuclear program...

...President Obama needs to realize that this is his "tear down this wall" moment.⁶¹

The fourth school holds that engagement has almost no chance of success; and

though regime change is a worthy policy, the Islamic Republic is unlikely to fall before getting the bomb. Unlike Lindsay and Takeyh, this group views containment and the corresponding acceptance of a nuclear Iran as unacceptable. Hence, the only remaining choice is military strikes. Daniel Pipes argues,

...if the apocalyptic-minded leaders in Tehran get the Bomb, they render the Middle East a yet more volatile and dangerous [place]. They might deploy these weapons in the region, leading to massive death and destruction...By eliminating the Iranian nuclear threat, Obama protects the homeland and sends a message to American's [sic] friends and enemies...

But the chance to do good and do well is fleeting. As the Iranians improve their defenses and approach weaponization, the window of opportunity is closing. The time to act is now or, on Obama's watch, the world will soon become a much more dangerous place.⁶²

CRITIQUES OF FOUR SCHOOLS REGARDING IRAN POLICY

Each of the four schools of thought is flawed in one way or another.

A valid counterpoint to the “engage Iran at all costs” approach is typified by John Hannah, who wrote that progress on the Iranian regime’s nuclear file will likely come not as “the result of any negotiation but in response to intense diplomatic and military pressure.”⁶³

Indeed, the first two schools of thought ignore the nature of the Iranian regime and treat Tehran as if it were a normal state with which one can exchange proposals and counterproposals in a sincere negotiating framework. However, it is in the ideological nature of the Iranian regime to cheat, pocket concessions, and renege on promises while appearing to negotiate in earnest. For evidence of the Iranian regime’s strategy of pocketing concessions without reciprocating, see the descriptions of Clinton and Bush administration Iran policy in Chapter One.

A clerical-totalitarian regime like Iran’s is incapable of meaningful engagement, and nuclear weapons are far more valuable in the domestic politics of Iran than any incentives the United States could offer.

Were the Iranian regime to compromise on the nuclear program, the apparent weakness on the international stage would signal internal vulnerability and provoke domestic opposition to the regime. Iran is unwilling to take such a risk to survival of clerical rule.⁶⁴

Not a cleric but aligned with clerics from his military base in the Revolutionary Guards, Ahmadinejad said about a European offer for Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, “They think they can take away our gold and give us some nuts and chocolate in exchange.”⁶⁵

More importantly, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has warned against any concessions because, in his words, “Any retreat ... would generate an endless chain of pressures and further retreats.”⁶⁶

The “engage at any costs” school also ignores the potential for regime change.⁶⁷ Contrary to comments by those who question the viability of the opposition after the 11 February 2010 demonstrations on the date of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the resiliency of the uprising is not defined by inability to take “final action,” but by the ability to defy the regime’s show of force, which happened but not in the anticipated numbers according to conventional wisdom. Despite the massive crackdown on

11 February, the regime has not succeeded in overriding the wave of opposition that began eight months prior to the commemoration of the Revolution.

On one hand, the generally accepted view is that the regime's crackdown snuffed out the opposition. On the other hand, the apparent low turnout was in fact high, but not identifiable because of devious actions by the putative leader of the opposition, Mir Hossein Mousavi. Intimidated by Supreme Leader Khamenei, Mousavi set a political trap for his own supporters. According to Iranian sources, Mousavi advised them not to wear green or chant "Down with the dictators; down with Velayat-e Faqih, [rule by clerics]; down with Khamenei." Instead, his supporters suggested the motto "Long live Khomeini, Mousavi and Khatami," which made it hard to distinguish anti-from pro-regime crowds. Consequently, the Mousavi "mousetrap" made it appear that street protests of 27 December 2009 on the Shiite holiday of Ashura had given way to state suppression on the 11 February anniversary of the Iranian Revolution.

Like the Leveretts, the Lindsay and Takeyh school of thought does not give due credit to the potential for the street to bring down the regime. And preparing for containment and conceding an eventual

nuclear-armed Iran do not adequately address the ideological nature of the regime to downplay deterrent constraints. Though it may be more likely than not that Iran can be deterred, even a small chance of failed deterrence would be an unacceptable risk where nuclear weapons are concerned, especially to Israel. The containment premise depends on the United States convincing Iran that it would be weakened by nuclear brinkmanship; but given the nature of the regime, Tehran is unlikely to be swayed from the belief that nuclear weapons enhance its coercive potential, especially toward its domestic opponents but also to its "near-abroad" in the Arab Gulf.⁶⁸

The third school of thought advocates a U.S. policy of regime change; it correctly assesses the inability of reaching a diplomatic solution with the Iranian regime after a year of sincere outreach by the Obama administration. Richard Haass and Robert Kagan separately bear witness to the latent potential of domestic opposition that has erupted to the surface several times since June 2009. Where Haass, Kagan, and other regime change proponents fall short, however, is in determining precise ways in which U.S. policy can maximize the potential of the Iranian street.



Natanz, the Iranian regime's primary site for uranium enrichment and a cornerstone of Tehran's nuclear program.

As the Iranian regime cracks down on groups of oppositionists, it inadvertently melds and radicalizes the dissident movement across different sectors of Iranian society and provides the momentum that was largely missing in 1999 and 2003 protests. But the opposition remains essentially leaderless, and regime change proponents would do well to consider how the United States might encourage a more organized and united opposition front.

Such a policy might consist of enhanced overt rhetorical support from Washington, material assistance to the Iranian street from expatriates, and removal of the terrorist tag from the main Iranian opposition organization, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq. Though such a policy might degrade the likelihood of diplomatic success with Tehran, the prospect of such a breakthrough is already miniscule.

The fourth school of thought calls for military strikes immediately, because its proponents believe a nuclear armed Iran is unacceptable. While they are correct on this count, they put insufficient faith in the ability of the dissident movement to topple the regime before it obtains nuclear weapons and too little emphasis on negative consequences of military strikes.

The latent potential of the Iranian street is addressed above; Tehran's retaliation against military strikes could mean huge costs to Israel and to U.S. interests in the Gulf area. Iran might order Hamas or Hezbollah strikes against Israel and disrupt shipping in the Gulf region with huge economic consequences.⁶⁹ While such costs may be worth paying as a last resort, a policy of regime change could obviate the necessity of military action. Furthermore, military strikes may only delay Iran's nuclear program.⁷⁰

In the same way that most of the diplomatic attention goes to Iran's nuclear weapons progress, the debate about potential military strikes focuses on nuclear sites. As both the Bush and Obama administrations made clear, the option of military action remains on the table.

And although Secretary of Defense Gates and Chairman of the Joints Chiefs Mike Mullen believe that bombing Iran would only delay but not stop the Iranian quest for nuclear armed status, the Secretary also authored a memo to the White House in January 2010; it called for the White House to have a "full range of contingencies with respect to Iran," including how to contain a nuclear armed Iran and implicitly included military strikes. And the Joint Chiefs Chairman

Mullen wrote an official Chairman's Guidance to his staff stating that while a military option regarding Iran would have only limited results against its nuclear facilities, "preparations needed to be stepped up."⁷¹

There are four known nuclear sites that would comprise the top priority targets for setting back Iran's nuclear program: Natanz uranium enrichment facility, Fordow uranium enrichment facility (near Qom), Isfahan uranium conversion facility, and Arak heavy water reactor. If these pillars of the Iranian nuclear program were destroyed or damaged, Tehran could be set back years from constructing a nuclear weapon.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) estimates that to reliably damage these four nuclear sites would require 75 combat aircraft: 37 aircraft for strikes and 38 aircraft dedicated to air escort/fighter sweep and Suppression of Enemy Air Defense aircraft.⁷²

In addition to nuclear sites, there are several missile development sites whose destruction would set back Tehran's missile programs essential for the delivery of any potential nuclear weapons. Sites at Arak, Isfahan, and Qom would be destroyed collaterally with attacks on nuclear facilities at those locations. Three

other sites are near the Arak heavy water reactor: Bakhtarun, Khorramabad, and Manzariyah. And a final site, Hasa, is near Isfahan and is responsible for actual missile production. CSIS estimates that an additional 10 aircraft could destroy these key missile sites.

Israeli Military Options

For a conventional airstrike on Iran's nuclear and missile facilities, Israel has three route options: To the north along the Syria-Turkey border; directly east through Jordan, Syria, and Iraq; and south through Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.

For the northern route option, there is little political or operational risk from Syria. Israel has nothing to lose politically from upsetting Damascus; Syrian air capabilities are weak along the border with Turkey and Israel is quite capable of disrupting Syria's air defense systems. Flying directly east would be more problematic, as it would upset Israel's good relations with Jordan, strain relations with Iraq and the United States, and put Israeli fighters at risk from denial by Jordan and Syria. Syria's air power is concentrated in the south, where this directly eastern route transits. The southern route poses the same political problems with Jordan, Iraq, and the United States, but greatly mitigates the

operational threats, by transiting only the southern tip of Jordan.

The distances involved in transiting any of the above routes would require approximately that each aircraft be refueled twice. Fuel demands would require that Israel's entire air refueling tanker fleet be airborne on both the inbound and outbound legs of strikes against Iran, a risky proposition because tankers would be vulnerable to attack along any of the three possible routes.

Israel also has the capability to launch a nuclear attack with submarine-based long-range cruise missiles and ground-based Jericho missiles. Such an attack would be operationally low-risk, as Iran has no effective missile defense system as long as Russia continues to delay delivery of the S-300PMU2 air defense system. However, the physical collateral damage and political fallout of a nuclear first strike by Israel effectively prohibit the nuclear option. By launching a nuclear first strike, Israel would jeopardize its alliances with the United States and Europe.

U.S. Military Options

A U.S. airstrike on Iran would most likely consist of B-2 bomber sorties flown from Diego Garcia and each carrying two Massive Ordnance Penetrators. Escort and Suppression of Enemy Air Defense



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah.

would be provided by F-18s in the U.S. 5th Fleet based in the Persian Gulf or F-15E and F-16C aircraft flown from Forward Operating Bases in the region.

Such a U.S. strike would have a much higher rate of success than Israeli attacks and could be sustained over a period of days. There would be no need for Israeli, Arab Gulf States, or NATO participation on military grounds; but politically, there is much to be gained from securing a broad coalition as a cover for a mainly American military operation.

Iranian Response

Too much overlooked by those who advocate immediate military strikes against Iranian nuclear and missile sites is the multitude of ways in which the Iranian regime can retaliate against the



United States and Israel. Furthermore, an exclusively Israeli attack would not rule out Iranian retaliation against the United States, nor would U.S. military action preclude Iranian attacks on Israel.

In the event of either a U.S. or Israeli attack on Iran's sites, Tehran has a variety of avenues by which to attack Israel. The Iranian regime could launch several Shahab-3 ballistic missiles, perhaps armed with chemical and/or biological warheads. Such weapons would be employed against civilian centers, government facilities, and Israel's nuclear sites.

Iran could also ignite a war between Israel and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon by ordering Hezbollah to launch rockets and suicide bombers against Israel reprising the 2006 war between the two. And Hamas could be encouraged to ignite a second war in Gaza by launching a barrage of rockets and/or suicide bombers in a repeat of the 2008-2009 Gaza war.

Though Tehran has fewer options for direct attacks on the United States or its assets, it can make U.S. operations in the area exceedingly difficult by stepping up support to Shiite militias in Iraq, as well as to the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. More directly, Iran could launch asymmetric terrorist attacks on U.S. military assets in the Persian (Arab) Gulf

or harass shipping.

If Iran could effectively close off the flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz and thereby bottle up Gulf oil, the international economy would be severely damaged. Iran regularly conducts military exercises in the Strait of Hormuz and Sea of Oman and Iranian senior Iranian naval officers have boasted about their ability to shut off the Strait of Hormuz to international shipping.

Although unlikely, Iran may not retaliate immediately or even at all to an attack on its nuclear facilities. Syria did not respond to an Israeli assault that destroyed its budding nuclear sites.⁷³ Iran also has a mixed record of retaliation. Consider an example of lack of military response. During July 1988, the *USS Vincennes* inadvertently downed an Iranian civil aircraft killing all 290 passengers. Tehran assumed the attack was an intentional outcome of Washington's entry into the Iraq-Iran War on the side of Baghdad, concluded a ceasefire to end the war, and apparently did not retaliate for the shoot-down.⁷⁴

This critique of four schools of thought regarding U.S. policy toward Iran in the war for Washington suggests the following: Military action is problematic and insufficient, containment is risky, and

engagement and isolation are hopeless. At issue is how to reinforce the street and speed up the process of change toward a regime that either gives up the quest for the bomb, e.g., South Africa; or whose possession is less onerous because of its democratic nature, e.g., India.

As diplomatic stalemate and Iranian street politics force the Obama administration to adjust its policies, expect the Obama doctrine to transition. With stalled nuclear talks and Iranian unrest liable to break out again, it makes less sense for President Obama to trade off democracy for stability to achieve a breakthrough nuclear deal with Tehran.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A nightmare scenario is that President Obama continues to trade democracy for stability, Iran breaks out from nonproliferation constraints, pro-democracy forces yield to state suppression, and dissidents lack leadership as well as a broad-based coalition to transform Iran from totalitarian rule to liberal democracy.

But consider an alternative scenario.

First, the Obama doctrine's assumption that the behavior of countries like Iran is more important than the nature of their governments or how they treat their own

people gives way to equal attention on behavior and regime nature.

Second, the Obama doctrine shifts from a presumption that when behavior conflicts with American ideals the language of diplomatic engagement with states is preferable to the rhetoric of confrontation; his doctrine based on "realism" gains a healthy dose of idealism, which might lead to more confrontational language with regimes like Iran.

Third, as democracy takes hold in Iraq; the Obama military surge in Afghanistan succeeds; the Taliban is routed from both Afghanistan and Pakistan; and al Qaeda is unable to sustain its affiliates' footholds in Yemen and in Somalia, these successes transform the Obama doctrine into ideas and ideals that could spell the beginning of the end of the clerical regime in Tehran.

But for the Obama doctrine to succeed in regime change from within Iran and avoid the problems of the Bush doctrine based on external regime change of Iraq, it is necessary for the Iranian street to gain the leadership and organizational skills of the resistance that led the struggle against the Shah; members of this resistance are in the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the Iranian parliament in exile, and its largest member, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK).

Without incorporating a regime change position into the Obama policies, his administration is likely to be caught up in a web of paradoxes and inconsistencies that characterized the false dilemma between isolation and engagement that bedeviled his predecessors. President Obama can solve this Persian puzzle with the assistance Iranian opposition groups, the topic of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 3

President Obama Solves
the Persian Riddle

BEYOND ISOLATION OR ENGAGEMENT

When confronted with a question whether to hit a tennis ball down the line or cross court, there is a principle applicable to politics: “Solve the riddle by going up the middle!” Instead of accepting a two-option choice, players could search for a third alternative. Similarly, rather than accepting the dichotomy of isolation or engagement, the Obama team might add promotion of democratic change in Iran.

Recall that a common pattern in U.S. approaches to post-revolutionary Iran has been shifting emphasis between isolation and engagement. At issue is the weight the Obama team will give to isolation, engagement, and internal regime change, in view of Iranian street politics and diplomatic developments regarding the Iranian regime’s nuclear file.

Unlike the situation of Iraq under Saddam Hussein, there is an Iranian opposition that does not require Washington to create it. Because Saddam destroyed his opposition, the United States felt a need to create one, which did not have an adequate base within Iraq to sustain an American regime change policy. Because an Iranian opposition exists both within the country and among Iranian

expatriates, these dissidents can support a move toward regime change with minimum of support from the United States and the other powers. Such an opposition allows Washington to avoid the false choice between isolation and engagement and move Iran toward constitutional democracy.

Before stalemated Geneva nuclear diplomacy in October 2009 and the uprisings following the June 2009 Iranian presidential election, the Obama administration gave more emphasis to engagement over isolation, almost ignoring the idea of democratic change for Iran. As politics of the street escalated and diplomacy faltered, the Obama team’s rhetoric transitioned to include more emphasis on pro-democracy forces and a return to the Bush approach of isolating Iran with a fourth round of UN sanctions.

POLICY-FORCING EVENTS: DIPLOMATIC STALEMATE AND THE IRANIAN STREET

That diplomacy is stalemated is apparent in lack of movement in the Geneva talks between the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council + Germany (P5+1) on one hand, and the Iranian regime on the other. While it is relatively easy to tell

TABLE 3

OBAMA ADMINISTRATION CONCESSIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAN

1. OBAMA NOWRUZ MESSAGE TO THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT OFFERING NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS	MARCH 2009
2. OBAMA SENDS LETTER TO SUPREME LEADER KHAMENEI OFFERING IMPROVED BILATERAL RELATIONS	MAY 2009
3. U.S. FORCES STAND BY WHILE IRAQI SECURITY FORCES ATTACK IRANIAN OPPOSITIONISTS AT CAMP ASHRAF, IRAQ	JULY 2009
4. P5+1 REACHES TENTATIVE AGREEMENT ON A DEAL TO ENRICH URANIUM ABROAD FOR IRAN	OCTOBER 2009
5. OBAMA NOWRUZ MESSAGE REITERATING WILLINGNESS TO NEGOTIATE WITH TEHRAN DESPITE REGIME INTRANSIGENCE	MARCH 2010
6. OBAMA ADMINISTRATION ATTEMPTS TO WATER DOWN IRAN SANCTIONS PASSED BY BOTH THE HOUSE AND SENATE	MAY 2010

whether negotiations are deadlocked, it is more difficult to determine if the Iranian street has stalled in efforts to express discontent with the regime or is biding time to gather steam and new momentum. This section makes the case that the Iranian street has paused, is awaiting new leadership, and is looking for incentives from the Great Powers to create a united opposition from within and without Iran.

Although the parties are deadlocked in the nuclear talks, President Obama’s expressed willingness to continue

extending a hand to the Iranian regime has the unintended effect of suppressing internal dissent while not motivating Tehran to make reciprocal gestures.

In light of diplomatic failure, some suggest learning to live with a nuclear-armed Iran.

According to Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, the United States ought “to accept that Iran will continue enriching uranium, and that the only realistic potential resolution to the nuclear issue would leave Iran in effect like Japan—a nation with an increasingly



Children march in Tehran during the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

sophisticated nuclear fuel-cycle program that is carefully safeguarded to manage proliferation risks.”¹

Others suggest moving away from proposal-counterproposal negotiations to coercive diplomacy of enhanced sanctions. Michael O’Hanlon and Bruce Riedel state that military strikes ought not to be an option and that “There is a better way: sanctions, deterrence and containment.”²

The Leverett solution of accepting an Iran with sophisticated uranium enrichment capabilities is contrary to the U.S. national interest and the security of U.S. allies in the region. And the basic level of structural interaction necessary for containment, such as an awareness of one another’s political red lines, simply does not exist between the United States and Iran.³

But O’Hanlon and Riedel are correct about the problems associated with

military strikes. As long as an Islamist regime is in power in Tehran, the United States faces a choice between bombing Iran and accepting an Iran with the bomb. The only outcome that avoids such a dilemma is for the regime to change. At issue is how the United States can promote such an outcome.

The key is to ride the energy created by events—diplomatic stalemate and street politics—to formulate a new policy of internal regime change based on Iranian expatriate support to their compatriots within Iran. But if demonstrations seem to be waning and Tehran feigns negotiating in earnest, such perceptions drain momentum from a new regime change policy process.

STREET POLITICS: DECLINING OR GATHERING STEAM?

The 31st anniversary of the Iranian Revolution was expected to be the most powerful showing to date of Iran's opposition movement.⁴ But Chapter Two shows that on 11 February 2010, anti-regime demonstrators were efficiently mixed with pro-regime supporters, giving the appearance of being dwarfed by crowds of regime followers. Tearing a page from their own playbook that helped bring down the Shah, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad blended their supporters

with detractors to present a false picture of solidarity in favor of the government.

Turn back the historical page three decades to place the 2010 events in perspective. Khamenei and Ahmadinejad understand they must prevent demonstrators from massing and creating a broad coalition of supporters against the regime. Likewise, as Khamenei and Ahmadinejad crack down on informal networks of peaceful demonstrators engaged in street politics, protestors are realizing the need for a broader coalition that includes stronger allies to balance State power. Without such partners, the 2009-2010 cycles of protest and State violence is likely to peter out like the cycles in Iran of 1999 and 2003, rather than the revolution of 1979.

During the 1906 Constitutional Movement and 1979 Iranian Revolution, alliances of students, workers, merchants, and clerics mobilized against unpopular regimes. In this respect, revolutionaries earned the support of the Iranian people and thereby overthrew the regimes.⁵

The last successful uprising, which began in 1978, culminated in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. It deposed the Shah and created the Islamic Republic. In 1999 and 2003, a similar cycle of protest and repression began, but was cut short



Students anti-regime protests on the streets of Tehran during the 1999 uprising.

before it could topple the regime, as a winning coalition failed to form and State power prevailed.

During 2009-2010, Tehran is using the same repressive tactics against both domestic activists and Iranian dissidents in Iraq. By doing so, the regime is unintentionally driving the two together and increasing the likelihood of a unified, organized opposition movement with a common regime change agenda that could create an even wider coalition precipitating a 1979 outcome and avoid 1999 or 2003 results.

The date of 8 September 1978 became known as “Black Friday” in the wake of a cycle of demonstrations and State repression that began that day. Invoking martial law, the Shah of Iran’s Government used tanks and helicopter gunships to attack peaceful demonstrators. The regime killed about 70 in Jaleh Square on Black Friday; and in other parts of the capital, there were some 25 people killed in clashes with the Shah’s martial law forces.

These civilian casualties were responsible for turning public opinion against the government and swelled the ranks of protestors to include workers in the oil sector. Another four months of demonstrations culminated in a general strike during October 1978, which closed

the petroleum industry, a sector critical to the Shah’s survival.⁶

In June 1981, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq organized a rally of about 500,000 people. This organization was at the forefront of the popular movement that brought down the Shah, but because of its secular orientation, the MEK was pushed out of the Revolutionary regime by Ayatollah Khomeini and his clerical supporters. Khomeini justified his dictatorship with the religiously unprecedented ideology in Islam of *Velayat-e Faqih*, in which clerics take political leadership as representatives of God on earth.

After twenty years of clerical rule, students initiated a revolt against the ruling clerics during July 1999: Students threw stones at the regime’s security services, set fire to images of the Supreme Leader, and engaged in battles with the police. Regime vigilantes and riot police stormed a university dormitory on the night of 8 July. Following the destruction, casualties, and detentions, the students overreached and expanded their protests.⁷

Unlike the 1978-1979 demonstrations, the 1999 protests played into the hands of the clerics and gave the security services a pretext for a crackdown. Ayatollah Khamenei announced that, “My basiji children in particular should maintain their

full alertness and through their presence everywhere they are needed, terrify and crush the wicked enemies.”⁸ The *bassij* are paramilitary units that are part of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the so-called guardians of the Revolution, and are used especially for domestic repression.

Because the regime was successful in winning the public relations battle and turning blame for violence to the students, the same mix of riot police and state-sponsored paramilitaries condemned for carrying out the student dormitory raid felt free to attack rioters with greater brutality during 1999.

Student demonstrations in 2003 also failed to attract a wide coalition to bring down the regime. Again, protests began with students, but did not include enough workers and others; hence, 2003 failed to spread to the general populace. Even more striking was the relative silence of the so-called reformist parties, which represent Iran’s “loyal” opposition and proved to be too cautious to support the students. This noticeable silence from mainstream political organizations helped to doom the 2003 protests.⁹ Although President George W. Bush made favorable statements regarding the students, he did not go beyond rhetoric, which was insufficient to turn the tide within Iran



A sticker on Shariati Street in Tehran memorializing Neda Agha-Soltan, who was killed by regime security forces during June 2009 election protests.

and create a widespread coalition in favor of them.

The events of 2009 saw hundreds of thousands of protesters in the streets across Iran. The Iranian regime responded with particular brutality on 16 June, killing some 20 protesters. Dozens more were murdered during a 20 June demonstration when a huge crowd defied the Supreme leader’s entreaty and took to the streets. One young woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, whose murder by regime agents was

caught on video, became a rallying point for oppositionists within Iran and elsewhere.¹⁰

First, comparisons of 1978-1979, 1999, and 2003 with 2009-2010 indicate the crucial importance broad coalitions with enough critical mass on the Iranian street to allow individuals to participate without appearing to be alone and vulnerable to State repressive forces.

Second, analysis of cases shows the significance of winning the battle for public opinion: When the demonstrators are perceived as victims of the repressive organs of the State, they win the hearts and minds of the public; likewise, when demonstrators overreach with disproportionate violence, the State is justified in using maximum force in response.

Third, the cases show the value of leadership to widen the coalition, organize demonstrations, and calibrate them to avoid being blamed in the court of public opinion for provoking State repression.

But for internal coalitions, public opinion, and leadership to work in concert for revolutionary change, there has to be some external support to boost flagging morale, view scenes from the front, and let the street know they are not alone in the fight for freedom. By incorporating

the Iranian opposition within Iran as well as in the Diaspora into his policies, President Obama could reinforce the street in its quest for regime change from within.

LOYAL AND DISLOYAL IRANIAN DISSIDENTS IN IRAQ AND IRAN

Initially, 2009 street protests revolved around support for Ahmadinejad's main electoral rival, Mir Hossein Mousavi, who is part of Iran's "loyal opposition," in the sense that he in no way opposes the legitimacy of the clerical regime or promotes regime change. As protests spread, though, activists became less enamored of Mousavi and began protesting against the entire system, not only the fraudulent election, and became a "disloyal opposition" movement with little use for Mousavi.

Some went as far as to tear down and burn photos not only of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, but also the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, thus breaking an untouchable taboo. Such disloyal actions brought the spontaneous street protestors more in line with opposition groups that had long questioned the legitimacy of the Islamist regime, such as the Mujahedeen-e Khalq.

As stated above, the Iranian regime



2009 Iranian Presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi stands proudly before an image of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, indicating his loyalty to the regime.

was cracking down on dissidents in the streets of Tehran and other cities; it was also directing its allies in the Government of Iraq to attack Iranian oppositionists on the Iraqi side of the border. The MEK, the same Iranian opposition group that fell out with Ayatollah Khomeini after the 1979 Revolution, is based at Camp Ashraf, Iraq, about 60 miles northeast of Baghdad.

The importance of the MEK may be seen by the fact that in virtually every negotiation with the Iranian regime about international security matters, Tehran mentions the organization.¹¹ Tehran is pressuring Baghdad to relocate the inhabitants of Camp Ashraf within Iraq



As anti-regime protests escalated in Iran, Iraqi Security Forces acting on behalf of Tehran attacked unarmed Iranian dissidents in Iraq during July 2009.

and extradite the leadership to Iran, where they would be subject to torture and execution.

During the American troop drawdown, it is critical that the remaining U.S. forces continue to monitor the safety of the MEK members, induce the Government of Iraq to refrain from either dispersal or extradition, and work with international human rights organizations to resolve the issues about the status of the Iranian dissidents in Ashraf.¹²

Because Ashraf is a source of inspiration for Iranian street, Tehran views the MEK as an existential threat, and has used every occasion to exert pressure on the Iraqi government to clamp down on the

group. Ahead of the Iranian Presidential elections, Khamenei was especially keen to eliminate the MEK. When the Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani, visited Tehran in February 2009, Khamenei told him “We await the implementation of our agreement regarding the expulsion of the hypocrites.”¹³

After Talabani’s visit to Iran, the Iraqi government, which had taken over the protection of Ashraf from U.S. forces a month earlier, began to impose greater restrictions on the residents of Ashraf. Iraqi Security Forces blocked the residents’ families, lawyers, and doctors from entering the Camp and denied food and fuel shipments from reaching Ashraf. These repressive actions were meant to compel the Iranian dissidents to leave Camp Ashraf. In April 2009, the Iraqi Interior Ministry conducted private interviews with all residents outside the Camp’s perimeter to see whether there was anyone willing to leave. However, only 11 residents out of 3,416 residents chose to depart.¹⁴

And on 16 April 2010, Iraqi forces attacked Ashraf residents and tried to overtake facilities inside the camp. According to Ashraf residents, Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and Qods Force were stationed

at the entrance of Ashraf for over two months, which implies Iranian collusion with Iraq over the disposition of the residents of Ashraf.¹⁵

There are additional indications of collusion between Baghdad and Tehran in the crackdown on the MEK: The state-controlled Iranian press celebrated and congratulated Baghdad for its suppressive actions, the speaker of Iran’s parliament stated that “Even though it is rather late, the action by the Iraqi government is praiseworthy,”¹⁶ and Iran’s ambassador to Iraq welcomed news that Baghdad was seriously pursuing a policy of expulsion of the Iranian dissidents.¹⁷

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) expressed concern regarding the human rights situation at Camp Ashraf.¹⁸ Ad Malkert, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Iraq, voiced his unease, and a UNAMI press release declared, “The UN continues to advocate that Camp Ashraf residents be protected from forcible deportation, expulsion or repatriation.”¹⁹

And in a Report to the UN Security Council in May 2010, the UN Secretary General Stated that the UN

...has continued to advocate for the [Camp Ashraf] residents’ unhindered access to goods and services of

a humanitarian nature, as well as for their right to be protected from arbitrary mass displacement or forced repatriation against their will in violation of the universally accepted principle of non-refoulement. UNAMI remains committed to assisting both parties find an acceptable resolution to this problem.²⁰

Iranian regime pressures on the Iraqi government culminated in a deadly raid on Ashraf on 28 and 29 July 2009. Though billed as an effort to extend Iraqi sovereignty over its territory and to establish a police station inside the Camp, as many as 2,000 Iraqi police, army, and Special Forces attacked the unarmed residents, killing 11 and wounding hundreds more. Iraq seized dozens as hostages and only released them after weeks of worldwide hunger strikes.²¹ In response to the attacks, a 31 July 2009 House Resolution with 224 Co-sponsors “[Deplored] the ongoing violence by Iraqi security forces against the residents of Camp Ashraf in Iraq.”²²

Simultaneous pressure on dissidents inside and outside of Iran was renewed during the first week of December 2009, when National Student Day events brought tens of thousands of protestors to the streets in clashes with police.²³

Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki announced that he planned to relocate the residents to a remote and uninhabitable detention center near the Saudi border.²⁴ The plan was met with worldwide condemnation as many, including Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman; he expressed concern that any attempt to forcibly displace the residents of Ashraf “could lead to bloodshed.”²⁵

Meanwhile, Iran’s widespread crackdown failed to extinguish the democracy movement. During the 10-day Shiite religious festival of Ashura, which began 18 December and climaxed 27 December, hundreds of thousands turned out again resulting in eight deaths and hundreds of arrests.²⁶ The fact that a senior regime cleric, Ayatollah Alamolhoda, credited the MEK with a command role among Ashura protestors indicates that the MEK is an integral part of pro-democracy forces in Iran. During 2009, there was increased cohesion between anti-regime protestors in Iran and disloyal opposition groups in Paris and Ashraf. Ashura commemorates the death of Imam Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet of Islam; Hussein was killed in Karbala, Iraq, during the 7th century.

Within Iran, an activist was sentenced to death after being found guilty of

membership in the Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK).²⁷ Such punishment is not unusual, as in October, another protester was sentenced to death for MEK membership.²⁸ The sentences are part of a broader effort to dissuade Iranians from joining the opposition movement, in which hundreds have been rounded up and convicted at show trials after making forced confessions.²⁹

During July 2009, Massoud Rajavi, historical leader of the MEK, expressed solidarity with “all those sentenced to death and tortured as well as all political prisoners.”³⁰

Another time the diverse oppositionists began to adopt the same agenda was in the aftermath of the 1992 assassinations of Iranian Kurdish leaders at a restaurant called Mykonos in Berlin. The German judiciary prosecuted the perpetrators, and its final ruling implicated the Iranian leadership, including Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei and then-President, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, leading one Iranian expatriate to muse,

Suddenly, the Iranian opposition was united. From one end of Turm Strasse [in Berlin], members of the People’s Mujahedeen crossed the street to embrace monarchist sympathizers on the other side. Former enemies linked

their arms as a decadent Persian dance tune called “Baba Karam” blared on the loudspeakers.³¹

During May 2010, five Kurdish activists were executed and six MEK sympathizers were sentenced to death, all for the crime of *Moharebeh* (enmity against God).³² The fact that the Iranian regime uses the same terms to describe the political activism of ethnic minorities and MEK members indicates their cohesion.

Such solidarity demonstrates the unintended effect of crackdown by the Iranian regime that enhances the cohesiveness of dissidents on the streets of Berlin, Tehran, and the countryside of Iraq.

While State repression helps unify the opposition, the clerical elites are developing fissures as their legitimacy is called into question. Although not on the table as of summer 2010, “crippling sanctions” that target the oil sector would exacerbate such splits and increase the likelihood that the cycle of peaceful protest and State violence leads to 1979, rather than 1999 and 2003. As would rhetoric from the Obama administration that highlights the egregious human rights violations of the Iranian regime, the nobility of those Iranians who sacrifice their bodies to protest for democracy, and the commitment of the United States to

the principle of self-determination for all peoples.

To the degree the Obama administration takes steps to unify Iranian oppositionists in Iran and in Iraq, broaden the worldwide coalition against Iran, and stand by the Iranian people when they stand up against the regime, the Obama team would reinforce the street for regime change.

Engaging Iranian dissidents within Iran begins with recognition that there are also Iranian oppositionists in Iraq and Paris who have broad support within the Iranian Diaspora.³³ Delisting of such groups from the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organizations list—the Mujahedeen-e Khalq and the National Council of Resistance of Iran—would so acknowledge. Removal would also be consistent with the United Kingdom and the European Union, which delisted the MEK in 2008 and 2009, respectively, and never designated the NCRI.

Websites associated with the Iranian regime pay attention to the Mujahedeen-e Khalq 350% more than all other opposition groups combined, including the “loyal” opposition of figures such as former President Khatami.³⁴

Also, Tehran repeatedly places its primary “disloyal” opposition on the negotiating table with Washington because that

opposition threatens the survival of the regime.³⁵

Whether President Obama takes steps to unify oppositionists within and outside of Iran depends not only on his policymaking process but also on the character of the man, which can be discerned from the language he uses about Iran.

PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC TOWARD IRAN

There exist two caricatures of President Obama’s character: the egg-headed, professorial dove and the sharp-elbowed, ruthless Chicago politician. President Obama began his first year in office dovish, offering Tehran negotiations without preconditions; but he has become firmer as Iran remains intransigent on the nuclear issue and violently suppresses the democratic aspirations of its citizens.

Yet, President Obama’s approach to Iran, like his method for dealing with other foreign policy issues, remains nuanced. On Afghanistan, the President rejected the options put forth by advisers and ultimately chose a policy that was robust in size and scope, but curtailed in duration. On Iran, President Obama condemns Tehran’s stalemating, lends



According to the *Washington Post* of 20 June 2009, 80,000 supporters of the National Council of Resistance of Iran from all over the world rally in Paris during June 2009.

modest rhetorical support to peaceful protestors, and pursues multilateral sanctions, all the while insisting that the United States remains committed to engagement.

Since President Obama's victory in passing a health care bill in spring 2010, he has become more forceful; if this recent past is prologue, perhaps now is the time to be more confrontational toward Iran.³⁶

During the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, the cornerstone of then-Senator Obama's proposed Iran policy and what set it apart from that of Senator and presidential candidate John McCain was the offer of bilateral negotiations with Tehran without preconditions; at the same time, however, candidate Obama insisted that a nuclear-armed Iran was unacceptable. In his first days in office, the White House website reported in



Then-Senators and Presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama.

a policy outline that “Barack Obama supports tough and direct diplomacy with Iran without preconditions.”³⁷

What appear to be contradictory policies in Afghanistan and in his first days in office is evidence that the President is able to integrate opposing viewpoints into combinations that make sense to him. If so, then he should be able to preside over formulation of a policy package that includes a diverse set of options. These could include an extended hand of engagement without preconditions to buy time for regime change; tough sanctions to facilitate such change; and active encouragement of democratic change by reaching out extensively to the Iranian people.

The first occasion for public outreach by President Obama to the Iranian regime was Nowruz, the Iranian New Year celebration, in March 2009. In a publicly broadcast video, the President said,

For nearly three decades relations between our nations have been strained. But at this holiday we are reminded of the common humanity that binds us together...

So in this season of new beginnings I would like to speak clearly to Iran’s leaders. We have serious differences that have grown over time.

My administration is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran and the international community. This process will not be advanced by threats. We seek instead engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect.

You, too, have a choice. The United States wants the Islamic Republic of Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations. You have that right -- but it comes with real responsibilities, and that place cannot be reached through terror or arms, but rather through peaceful actions that demonstrate the true greatness of the Iranian people and civilization. And the measure of that greatness is not the capacity to destroy, it is your demonstrated ability to build and create.³⁸

Then on 8 April, the Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) made a formal request for negotiations with Iran, which was initially met with silence from Tehran and would not be accepted until September. Sometime during May 2009, before the June Presidential election in Iran,

President Obama sent a letter directly to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei urging engagement.³⁹

The Administration's Iran outreach was placed in a larger context of dialogue with the Muslim world in President Obama's much anticipated 4 June Cairo speech, during which he said,

This issue [nuclear proliferation] has been a source of tension between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. For many years, Iran has defined itself in part by its opposition to my country, and there is in fact a tumultuous history between us. In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians. This history is well known. Rather than remain trapped in the past, I've made it clear to Iran's leaders and people that my country is prepared to move forward. The question now is not what Iran is against, but rather what future it wants to build.

... And any nation – including Iran – should have the right to access

peaceful nuclear power if it complies with its responsibilities under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. That commitment is at the core of the treaty, and it must be kept for all who fully abide by it. And I'm hopeful that all countries in the region can share in this goal.⁴⁰

The conciliatory rhetoric of the administration up until the June Presidential election in Iran was complicated by the peaceful demonstrations and State repression that followed the election. Since violence erupted, President Obama has tried to thread the needle of encouraging Tehran to engage while not appearing to condone Iranian regime violence against protestors, a difficult proposition indeed. In his first public statement about the election, the President said,

I want to start off by being very clear that it is up to Iranians to make decisions about who Iran's leaders will be; that we respect Iranian sovereignty and want to avoid the United States being the issue inside of Iran.

... I've always believed that as odious as I consider some of President Ahmadinejad's statements, as deep as the differences that exist between the United States and Iran on a

range of core issues, that the use of tough, hard-headed diplomacy – diplomacy with no illusions about Iran and the nature of the differences between our two countries – is critical when it comes to pursuing a core set of our national security interests, specifically, making sure that we are not seeing a nuclear arms race in the Middle East triggered by Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon; making sure that Iran is not exporting terrorist activity. Those are core interests not just to the United States but I think to a peaceful world in general. We will continue to pursue a tough, direct dialogue between our two countries, and we'll see where it takes us.⁴¹

Critics contend that reactions by the Iranian leadership to President Obama's statement that the United States was not seeking to destabilize Iran may have given away too much for too little, communicated weakness instead of strength to the regime, and set the stage for more intransigence from Tehran and expectations that Washington is so willing to engage that it will make even more concessions.

Furthermore, President Obama's focus on differences between Iran and the United

States in terms of national security interests overlooks the ideological nature of the Iranian regime. Because ideology often trumps interests for Iran, President Obama would be well advised to take into account the nature of the revolutionary regime in Tehran. Treating Iran as if it were a normal state mainly concerned with its national interests overlooks evidence to the contrary.⁴²

Perhaps in response to critics who accused President Obama of being too soft on the Iranian regime and inadvertently implying that the United States did not stand solidly behind the Iranian people, he stepped up the intensity of his criticism of Tehran. But even then, his rhetoric was measured, cool, and lacking in the kind of passion that the Iranian street expected from his presidential campaign and hoped to hear from the President of the United States.

In his 19 June television interview with CBS News, the President was slightly more outspoken in criticizing violence against protestors:

What you're seeing in Iran are hundreds of thousands of people who believe their voices were not heard and who are peacefully protesting and seeking justice. And the world is watching. And we stand

behind those who are seeking justice in a peaceful way. Already we've seen violence out there. I've said this throughout the week, I want to repeat it, that we stand with those who would look to peaceful resolution of conflict and we believe that the voices of people have to be heard...⁴³

By contrast, when President Bush reacted to the Iranian elections of 2005, he said that,

Today, Iran is ruled by men who suppress liberty at home and spread terror across the world...

Power is in the hands of an unelected few who have retained power through an electoral process that ignores the basic requirements of democracy. The June 17th [2005] presidential elections are sadly consistent with this oppressive record...

As you stand for your own liberty, the people of America stand with you.⁴⁴

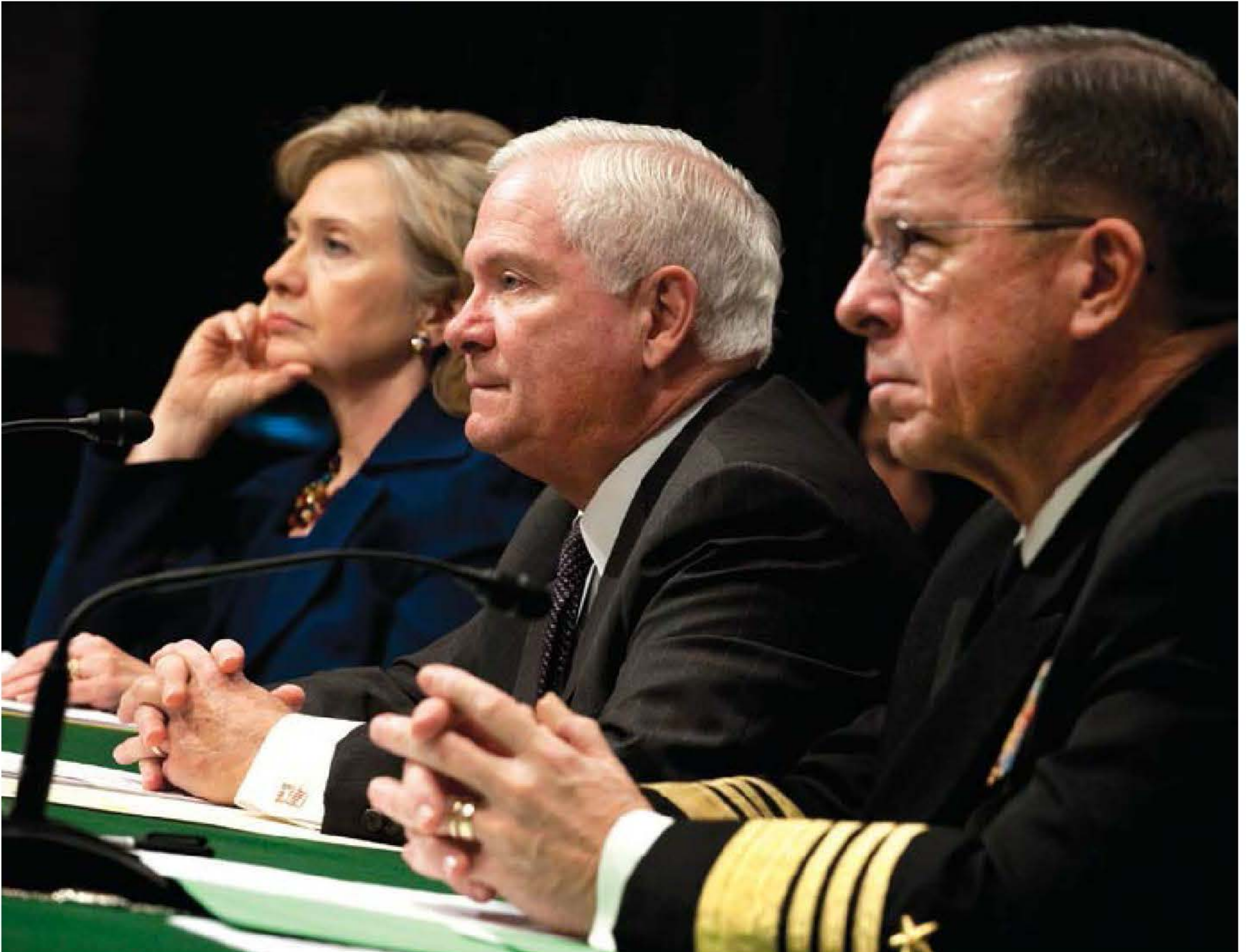
Although President Obama was on a slope of increasing intensity, his comments still did not match the rhetorical flourishes of President Bush; in this regard, consider the 20 June statement of President Obama:

The Iranian government must understand that the world is watching. We mourn each and every innocent life that is lost. We call on the Iranian government to stop all violent and unjust actions against its own people. The universal rights to assembly and free speech must be respected, and the United States stands with all who seek to exercise those rights.⁴⁵

As presidential language heated up in favor of Iranian protestors within Iran, such oratory was virtually nonexistent about the fate of Iranian dissidents located in Iraq. Following the 27 July 2009 Iraqi Security Forces attack on the main Iranian opposition organization, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq, Obama administration principals were mostly silent or too measured in their response. Secretary of State Clinton stated,

...with respect to the MEK at Camp Ashraf, we are urging restraint on both sides.

The government of Iraq has stated that the residents of Camp Ashraf will be treated in accordance with Iraq's constitution, laws and international obligations. The Iraqi government has assumed security responsibility for Camp Ashraf and



Testifying before Congress, from left to right: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen.

its residents, which, obviously, largely consists of MEK members.

...And although the U.S. government remains engaged and concerned about this issue, it is a matter now for the government of Iraq to resolve in accordance with its laws.

And we are very clear that we expect that the government of

Iraq, now that it has assumed the security responsibility, will fulfill its obligations to show restraint, will not forcibly transfer anyone to a country where such a transfer might result in the mistreatment or the death of that person based on their political affiliation and activities.⁴⁶

It was particularly telling for Secretary

Clinton to urge “restraint on both sides,” since all the victims were Ashraf residents who had been disarmed by the United States following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. And critics compared calls on people of Ashraf to act with restraint to requesting young unarmed and nonviolent civil rights demonstrators to act with restraint when armed police officers began to beat the youths with nightsticks.

But the Bush administration was no better than the Obama team in ignoring the plight of the citizens of Ashraf. To his credit, however, President Bush publicly credited these Iranian dissidents for revealing nuclear secrets of the Iranian regime:

Iran has concealed its - a nuclear program. That became discovered not because of their compliance with the I.A.E.A or N.P.T. but because a dissident group pointed it out to the world. And which raised suspicions about the intentions of the program. You can understand why. It's a nontransparent regime there run by a handful of people. And so suspicions were raised.⁴⁷

Although President Bush did not mention the NCRI or MEK by name, there is no doubt they are the ones about which he spoke because they were the source of

the revelations in question. (See below in the next section for a further description of such revelations.) But Bush did little to aid the Iranian dissidents located in Iraq during periods of Iranian regime-inspired shortages of food, oil, and other necessities of life.

To distract from its crackdown on dissidents in Iran and use of Iraqi proxies to attack oppositionists in Iraq, Tehran tabled a new proposal to the P5+1 in September 2009. The new policy package did not even mention the nuclear issue, but became the basis for talks scheduled for 1 October.⁴⁸

One week before the October meeting, the United States, United Kingdom, and France presented new evidence to the IAEA of a secret underground uranium enrichment site too small for peaceful energy purposes and clearly in violation of Iran's NPT obligations.

President Obama's remarks were his harshest yet regarding the nuclear issue:

... Iran's decision to build yet another nuclear facility without notifying the IAEA represents a direct challenge to the basic compact at the center of the non-proliferation regime.

... This site deepens a growing concern that Iran is refusing to live up to those international



President Barack Obama, French President Nicholas Sarkozy, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, and Michelle Obama during the September 2009 G20 Summit in Pittsburgh.

responsibilities, including specifically revealing all nuclear-related activities. As the international community knows, this is not the first time that Iran has concealed information about its nuclear program. Iran has a right to peaceful nuclear power that meets the energy needs of its people. But the size and configuration of this facility is inconsistent with a peaceful program.⁴⁹

Despite sharp criticism of Iran's nuclear record and concealment of activities, President Obama did not abandon the negotiating process:

We have offered Iran a clear path toward greater international integration if it lives up to its obligations, and that offer stands.⁵⁰

Following the 1 October Geneva meeting between the P5+1 and Iran, President Obama sought to provide some rhetorical momentum for progress in the negotiations. He praised the meeting as a constructive start, indicated what the P5+1 required of Iran, and made clear that the patience of the P5+1 was not infinite:

...today's meeting was a constructive beginning, but it must be followed by constructive action by the Iranian government.

First, Iran must demonstrate its

commitment to transparency...

Second, Iran must take concrete steps to build confidence that its nuclear program will serve peaceful purposes -- steps that meet Iran's obligations under multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions...

We're committed to serious and meaningful engagement. But we're not interested in talking for the sake of talking. If Iran does not take steps in the near future to live up to its obligations, then the United States will not continue to negotiate indefinitely, and we are prepared to move towards increased pressure.

As October negotiations proceeded, the P5+1 believed it was making progress toward a nuclear fuel swap deal that would send some of Iran's enriched uranium out of the country for processing and return at a later date. With the deal hanging in the air, on the anniversary of the 1979 seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, President Obama continued to press Iran to accept the swap:

We have recognized Iran's international right to peaceful nuclear power. We have demonstrated our willingness to take confidence-building steps along with others in the international community.



President Obama during his January 2010 State of the Union address.

We have accepted a proposal by the International Atomic Energy Agency to meet Iran's request for assistance in meeting the medical needs of its people. We have made clear that if Iran lives up to the obligations that every nation has, it will have a path to a more prosperous and productive relationship with the international community.

Iran must choose.⁵¹

The hopes of the P5+1 were dashed in mid-November when the Iranian Foreign Minister announced that Iran would only accept a simultaneous nuclear fuel swap on its own soil, which was a nonstarter, as it would instantly leave Iran with more highly enriched uranium.⁵²

As the President's language became harsher on Iran's nuclear file, it also became more hostile on the crackdown of the regime on its citizens.

With the nuclear issue stalemated, there was another outbreak of violence in Iran during the commemoration of Ashura in late December 2009. President Obama offered his harshest criticism yet of Iranian regime suppression of protestors:

The United States joins with the international community in strongly condemning the violent and unjust suppression of innocent Iranian

citizens, which has apparently resulted in detentions, injuries, and even death.

...the decision of Iran's leaders to govern through fear and tyranny will not succeed in making those aspirations go away.⁵³

And during his January State of the Union Address, the President had tough words for Iran over the regime's intransigence on the nuclear issue:

Now, these diplomatic efforts have also strengthened our hand in dealing with those nations that insist on violating international agreements in pursuit of nuclear weapons...That's why the international community is more united, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is more isolated. And as Iran's leaders continue to ignore their obligations, there should be no doubt: They, too, will face growing consequences. That is a promise.⁵⁴

After the administration slowly tried to build consensus for multilateral sanctions against Iran during the first quarter 2010, President Obama broadcast a second Nowruz message to follow the 2009 video. On 20 March, the President continued to hold out the promise of better relations for progress on the nuclear file, but lamented that Tehran had failed

to engage sincerely over the prior year:

We know what you're against;
now tell us what you're for.

For reasons known only to them, the leaders of Iran have shown themselves unable to answer that question. You have refused good faith proposals from the international community. They have turned their backs on a pathway that would bring more opportunity to all Iranians, and allow a great civilization to take its rightful place in the community of nations. Faced with an extended hand, Iran's leaders have shown only a clenched fist.

President Obama also addressed the election protests:

...tragically, the aspirations of the Iranian people were also met with a clenched fist, as people marching silently were beaten with batons; political prisoners were rounded up and abused; absurd and false accusations were leveled against the United States and the West; and people everywhere were horrified by the video of a young woman killed in the street.

Finally, the President indicated that the international community was moving toward the imposition of sanctions:

...we are working with the international community to hold the Iranian government accountable because they refuse to live up to their international obligations.⁵⁵

Though it was gradual and nuanced, the trajectory of Obama administration rhetoric from the 2009 inauguration to early 2010 is clear. Over time, the President came to believe that Iran is not sincerely interested in a negotiated solution to the nuclear impasse; likewise, President Obama clearly believes in the injustice of the Iranian regime in its suppression of peaceful protestors.

At issue is which policy package of prescriptions result from these realizations. To address whether the Obama administration would incorporate the Iranian opposition as a core element of its policies toward Iran, consider the value to American national security of two related Iranian opposition organizations—the parliament in exile of the Iranian people, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and its largest unit, the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK).

NATIONAL SECURITY BENEFITS TO THE UNITED STATES FROM IRANIAN OPPOSITIONISTS

As Obama administration language toward Iran heats up, the President might consider how outreach to the regime might be balanced by comparable attention to Iranian oppositionists as a road to the achievement of U.S. national security benefits.

Not only do the NCRI and MEK politically threaten the survival of the Iranian regime, the organizations play the main role in exposing Tehran's nuclear weapons program and subversion of Iraq. Iranian opposition groups are critical sources of intelligence on Iran's nuclear program. Indeed, National Council of Resistance of Iran nuclear revelations have been validated when compared with other intelligence information and IAEA inspections.⁵⁶

According to Dr. Frank Pabian, Senior Nonproliferation Analyst at the U.S. Los Alamos National Laboratory, "They're [the NCRI] right 90 percent of the time. That doesn't mean they're perfect, but 90 percent is a pretty good record."⁵⁷

Indeed, because Iranian opposition organizations do have a stake in political outcomes, their information is best treated as lead intelligence with which

to compare with other information, such as that provided by defectors. One such defector is Shahram Amiri, a nuclear scientist who defected during June 2009 and has reportedly been providing U.S. intelligence services with valuable information.⁵⁸

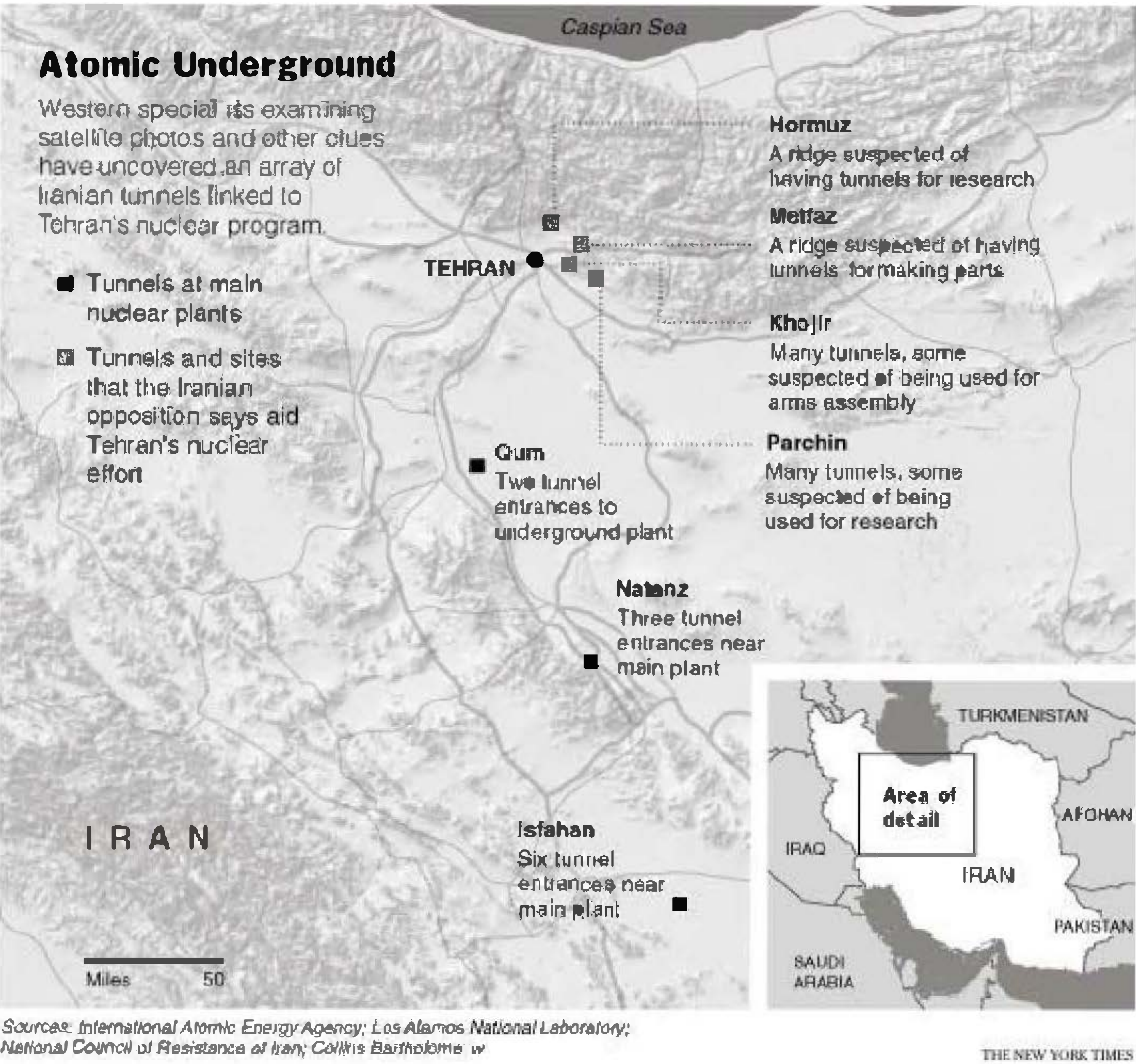
In addition to exposing covert uranium enrichment in Natanz, the NCRI revealed Qom's tunnels at a December 2005 news conference. The Qom tunnels are part of the same site that was highlighted by the United States during September 2009 as a clandestine uranium enrichment facility. The NCRI had supplied details of the site to the United Nations several years ago, but no nuclear inspections were carried out at the time.⁵⁹

Among the NCRI's other revelations are

- A heavy water production facility at Arak, operational since 2006⁶⁰
- Kalaye Electric Company, an enrichment centrifuge testing facility in Tehran⁶¹
- A nuclear facility at Lavizan-Shian that was razed to the ground purportedly to hide evidence from the IAEA⁶²
- A laser enrichment facility at the Center for Readiness and New Defense Technology (known as Lavizan 2), built with equipment removed from the Lavizan-Shian site, kept off limits to the



Iran's secret uranium enrichment facility at Qom; tunneling at the site was first revealed by the NCRI in 2005. Photo Credit: GeoEye



Courtesy New York Times

- IAEA since its 2004 revelation⁶³
- A sprawling uranium conversion facility at Isfahan, used to convert uranium “yellowcake” into uranium hexafluoride, the feedstock for centrifuges⁶⁴
- Far-reaching tunnels and hardened underground bunker sites near Tehran and elsewhere, built to hide Iran’s nuclear weapons program and missiles⁶⁵
- An extensive use of Revolutionary Guards military complexes, such as Imam Hussein University for research and development⁶⁶
- A widespread use of national universities, such as Malek-Ashtar University for nuclear weapons research and development⁶⁷
- A secret company in Tehran producing P1 (aluminum rotor) and P2 (steel rotor) centrifuges for uranium enrichment; P2 centrifuges enrich uranium much faster than the P1; P stands for Pakistan.⁶⁸



Arak heavy water production facility, a key component in Iran's nuclear program.

- A covert military facility in the Khojir area in Tehran where Iran is working on the development of nuclear warheads.⁶⁹
- A new command and control center, known as Mojdeh site, for nuclear weapons development directly reporting to the Defense Minister.⁷⁰

On 24 September 2009, the NCRI revealed two additional sites in and near Tehran where the Iranian regime is working on detonators for nuclear weapons. The sites are part of METFAZ, a Farsi acronym for Research Center for Explosion and Impact.⁷¹

According to a leaked Field for the Expansion of Deployment of Advance Technology (Fedat) memo written in 2007, Tehran had a four-year plan to develop and test a neutron initiator.

And Russian scientists visited Iran as recently as 2003 to provide technical training and instructions on building triggering devices.⁷²

In November 2007, a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's Nuclear Weapons Program judged "with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program... Assess with moderate confidence Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons program as of mid-2007." ⁷³

The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) responded to the 2007 NIE by conducting an all source review, which determined that Tehran had halted weaponization work at its Lavizan-Shian facility and allowed the IAEA to inspect the site; but Tehran had moved its weaponization research to a new site: Lavizan-II, which was never inspected.

In early 2010, IAEA and U.S. Intelligence Community statements validate the NCRI position on continued weaponization. In its February 2010 report, the IAEA cited the "possible existence in Iran of past or current undisclosed activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile." Such accusations are remarkable considering the usual rhetorical caution of the IAEA.

And a new U.S. National Intelligence Estimate is in the offing, due for circulation within the U.S. Government during 2010, which reverses the conclusions of the 2007 NIE regarding cessation of weaponization work.

The 2010 edition of the CIA Weapons Intelligence, Nonproliferation and Arms Control Center (WINPAC) annual report to Congress foreshadows the conclusions of the new NIE. According to CIA officials, the report states that "Iran continues to develop a range of



Former President George W. Bush meets with Sunni Awakening Council leaders in Iraq.

capabilities that could be applied to producing nuclear weapons, if a decision is made to do so” and Iranian decision makers are “keeping the door open to the possibility of building a nuclear weapon.”⁷⁴

If the MEK is dispersed from or within Iraq, valuable intelligence would be lost.

In addition to insisting against such dispersal and insisting on protection of MEK members at Ashraf consistent with the Fourth Geneva Convention Protected Persons status granted them in 2004, the United States could remove the group from its list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. Doing so would

diminish the public rationale of the Iraqi Government for dispersal, which is being used to mask the fact that Baghdad is merely acquiescing to the wishes of Tehran.

Regarding Iraqi plans to destroy Camp Ashraf, Secretary of State Clinton told the State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee in February 2010,

We do support... human rights [of the people of Ashraf]. We have repeatedly told the Iraqi government that we expect their human rights to be protected.

We have, in prior administrations, designated the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization. We do support Iraqi sovereignty over Ashraf, and we do hold the Iraqi government responsible for how the members of the MEK are treated, and we expect the Iraqi government to honor its written assurances that it will treat the MEK members humanely. It will not forcibly relocate them to any country where they could be persecuted for religious or political beliefs or where they could be tortured.

And we support international participation in trying to resolve this matter.

And during an October 2008 fact-finding trip to Iraq, Sunni politicians told an IPC delegation that after they boycotted the January 2005 parliamentary elections, it was during MEK-sponsored meetings at Camp Ashraf that they decided to participate in December 2005 elections to avoid being cut out of governance. As sectarian violence increased, the MEK organized Sunni tribal chiefs in Diyala Province into local “community watch” programs that became the nuclei for future Awakening Councils.⁷⁵

But most important were the dozens of meetings brokered by the MEK between the U.S. military and Sunnis at the fringes of the insurgency, which peeled “off those who are tribal leaders, regional leaders, Sunni nationalists, from a more radical, messianic brand of insurgency,” to quote President Obama.⁷⁶

Were the MEK extradited from or dispersed within Iraq, their value as an interlocutor would be lost.

In addition, extradition of the MEK leaders to Iran or dispersal of the rank and file within Iraq would not only lead to a humanitarian catastrophe, it would make it more difficult for President Obama to add promotion of democratic change into the mix of his policies for Iran. Extradition and dispersal would work against the idea



During October 2008, Raymond Tanter headed an IPC delegation that met with some of the same Iraqi Sunni Sheikhs in Iraq who met with President Bush.

of a unified Iranian opposition and reduce its chances to change the regime from within. As a result, President Obama would be as likely to be stuck on the same horns of the dilemma of isolation or engagement that characterized his predecessors.

IRANIAN OPPOSITION TERRORIST DESIGNATION HARMS DEMOCRATIC CHANGE IN IRAN

If President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton were interested not only in protecting the rights of Iranian dissidents, but also in sending a signal to the Iranian people that the

United States stands with them against the Iranian regime, research of the Iran Policy Committee suggests that the Secretary consider reversing the terrorist designations of the MEK and NCRI. Not only would such delisting be an essential component of any regime change policy, it would be consistent with the legal criteria for designation.

IPC research indicates that removal of the MEK and NCRI from the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organizations list is warranted under the Anti-Terrorism Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA). According to the law, the Secretary of State may revoke a designation if

- Circumstances that were the basis for the designation have changed so as to warrant revocation, or
- National security of the United States warrants revocation

While the law stipulates that even if an organization is engaged in terrorism or retains the capability and intent to do so, national security considerations may warrant its removal from the FTO list, the reverse does not apply; national security considerations alone cannot justify a decision as to whether an organization should remain on the list. Any determination by a Secretary of State to maintain a designation must have

substantial support in the record as a whole. The Secretary must demonstrate that the organization in question is currently engaged in terrorism or terrorist activity, or retains the capability and intent to engage in such acts.⁷⁷

In fact, Ambassador Dell Dailey, State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism, argued for delisting during the 2008 designation review, but Secretary Rice maintained the listing anyway.⁷⁸

And State's annual *Country Reports on Terrorism* is devoid of any evidence that the group continues to engage in terrorism, instead focusing on nonterrorist allegations. It seems as if Secretary Rice made the decision to continue the listing based on nonterrorist foreign policy considerations, rather than on facts about terrorist capability and intent. Such a decision not only contradicts the legal standard of focusing on "circumstances," but also makes the list appear to be a political tool, which discourages friendly governments from cooperating with the United States in combating other listed terrorist groups.⁷⁹

Regarding circumstances, in June 2001, the MEK made a formal decision to cease military activity and has not conducted any attacks anywhere in the world since 2001; the MEK relinquished all

military hardware to Coalition Forces and renounced violence in 2003. These events were affirmed by the Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission (POAC) of the United Kingdom, which ordered the UK Government to deproscribe the group in November 2007.

In October 2008, the European Union (EU) Court of First Instance ruled that EU Council of Ministers evidence for designation was insufficient.

On 4 December 2008, this Court came down on the side of delisting the main Iranian opposition group from the EU terrorist list.

The EU Council must review terrorist designations every six months. The Court of First Instance ruling annulled an EU Council of Ministers decision (2008/583/EC) of 15 July 2008, which placed restrictions on members and entities of the Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK), known in Europe as the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI).

The Court based its judgment on the Council's inability to provide credible evidence that those whose funds had been frozen were in any way involved in terrorism. IPC research indicates that no such evidence exists, which is consistent with the fact that the ruling was the fastest in EU history, made in fewer than 24 hours.

Because this decision came on the heels of three other Court of First Instance rulings, all in favor of delisting the MEK, and in the absence of any new evidence of terrorism available to any of the 27 member states of the European Union, the EU Council, which is the executive branch, removed the group from its list of terrorist organizations when the mandatory six month review of the list took place during January 2009.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Solving the Persian riddle of choosing between two infeasible options requires recognition that the nature of the Iranian regime makes engagement and sanctions difficult though not impossible to succeed. But a combination of engagement to buy time, sanctions to increase costs to the ruling elite, as well as funding and leadership from Iranian expatriates to their compatriots within Iran can threaten the survival of the regime and solve the riddle.

Policy forcing events, such as diplomatic stalemate, unrest on the Iranian street, and Tehran's crackdown on its opposition among the expatriate community, provide President Obama an opportunity to seize the time and create a new approach that places the Iranian opposition at the core of the policymaking process. While at

first blush it appears as if street politics in Iran is on the decline in face of regime suppression, in fact, the street is building up steam for a new onslaught against the regime. Increasing presidential rhetorical support would energize the street; assistance in coordinating the street with the Iranian Diaspora would allow the disloyal opposition to coalesce.

If President Obama becomes aware of U.S. national security benefits from the Iranian opposition, he is likely to consider removal of the terrorist tag. And as he becomes acquainted with the historical circumstances that led to the unwarranted terrorist designation and misreading of the legal requirements for continued designation, President Obama is also likely to order removal of the listing of the main Iranian opposition groups from the State Department Foreign Terrorist Organizations list.

If internal regime change is to be given its best chance of success by the Obama administration, the Iranian street needs funding, leadership, and organizational skills but not from the United States. The Iranian expatriate community is well able to provide such support. The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the Iranian parliament in exile, and its largest constituent unit, the Mujahedeen-e

Khalq (MEK), are the best organized and most powerful of the Iranian opposition groups; and they are the most feared by the Iranian regime.⁸⁰ Research indicates that they play an important role among the pro-democracy forces in Iran to bring about regime change from within. But their hands are tied by the terrorist tag, which has the inadvertent consequence of appeasing the Ayatollahs and suppressing democracy in Iran.

IPC research on the published list of 20,000 MEK members and associates executed by the regime shows they primarily belong to the middle class, including technocrats, workers, bazaar merchants, and small business owners.

It is noteworthy that the driving engine of the past three major social upheavals of Iran in the 20th century has been the middle class. The MEK also has an impressive level of support among the nearly 4 million Iranian exiles; these émigrés have consistently organized the largest gatherings of the Iranian Diaspora in Europe and the United States.

If character is a good predictor of leadership, President Obama will rise to the occasion and formulate a policy that allows him to marry sanctions against Iran with outreach to Tehran to buy time for regime change from a

reinforced, widespread Iranian opposition. The professorial dove who emphasized mainly engagement is giving way to the sharp-elbowed, Chicago politician, who is increasingly tough in response to diplomatic stalemate and repression by the Iranian regime.

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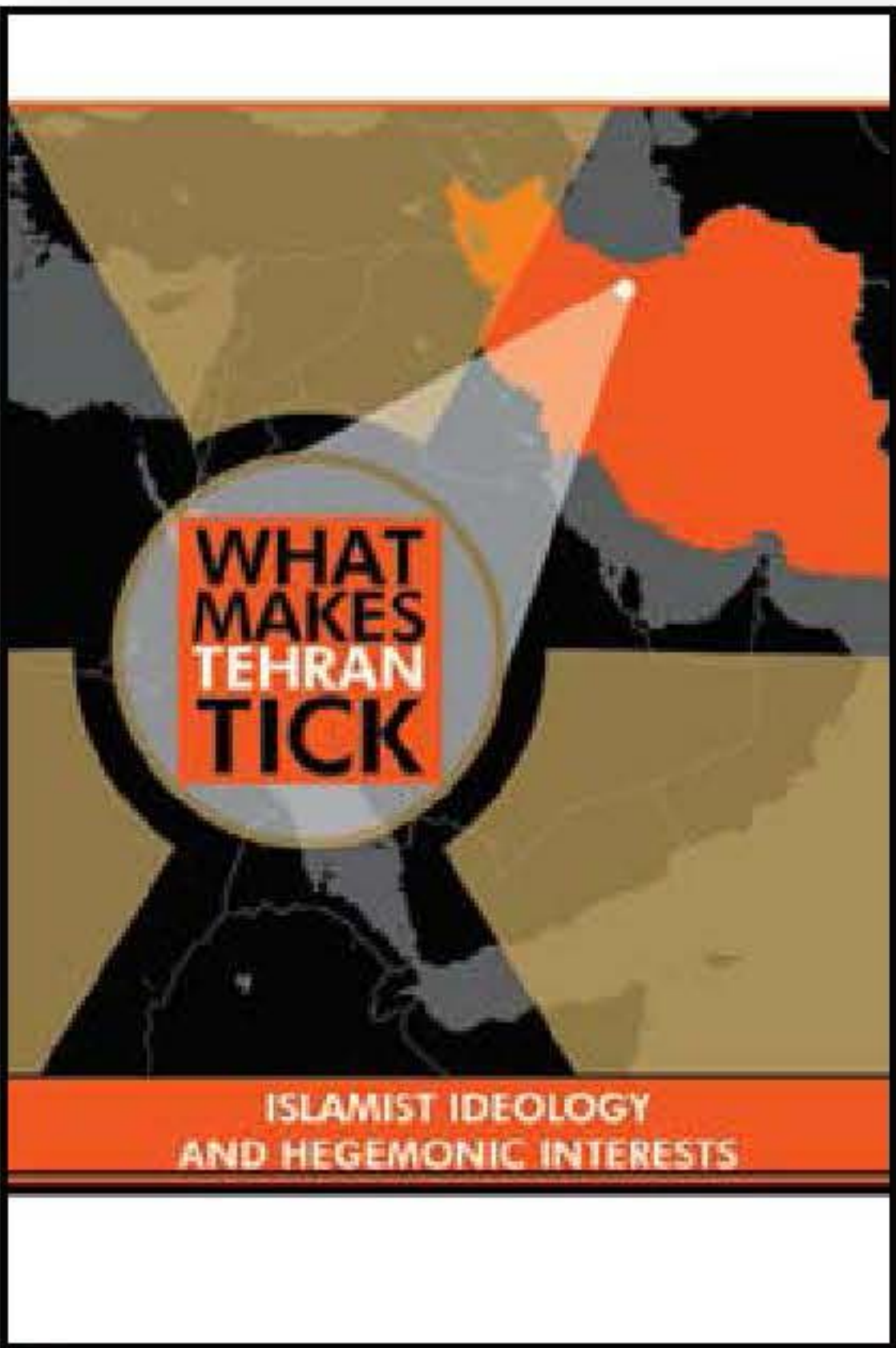
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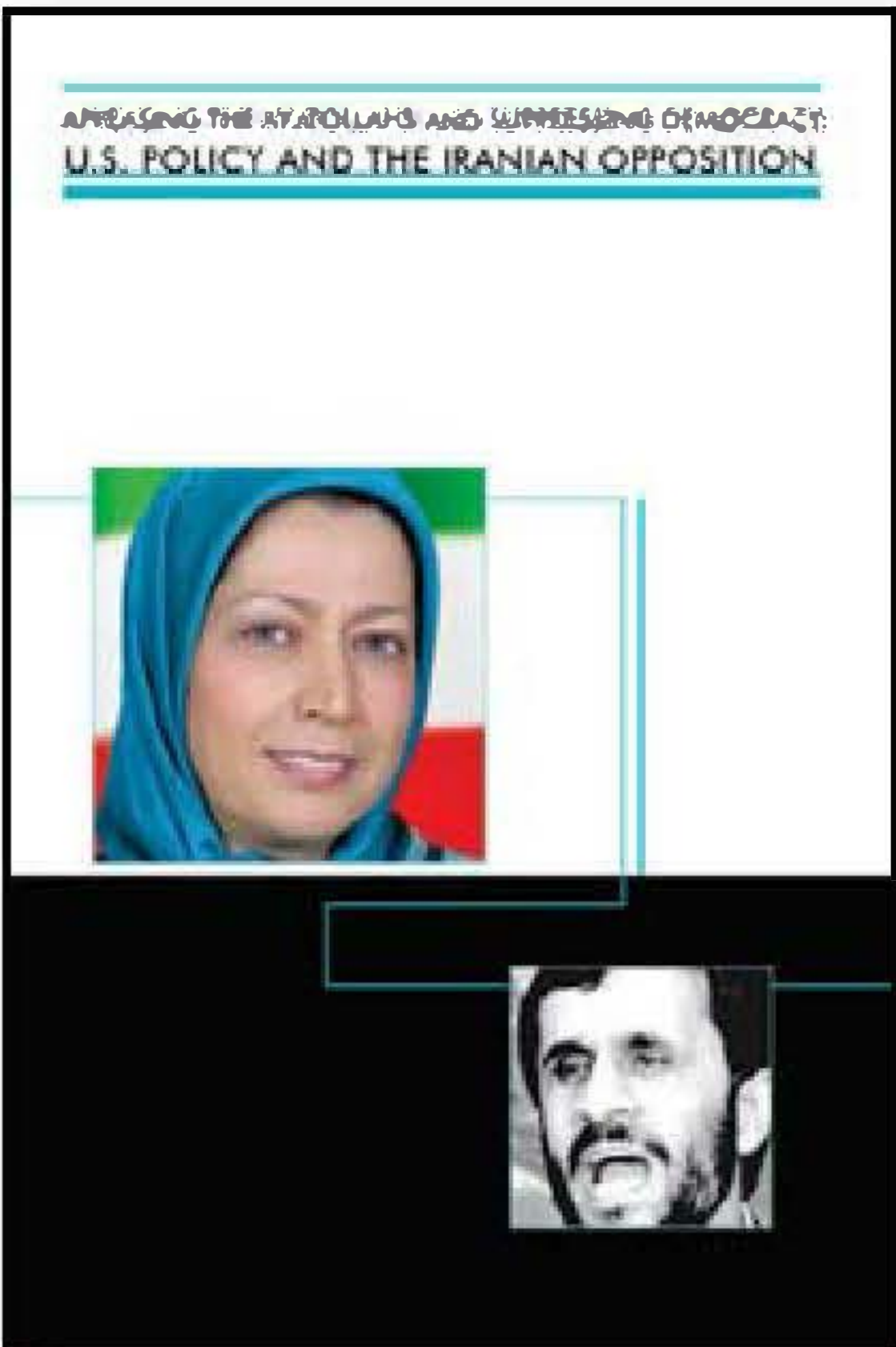
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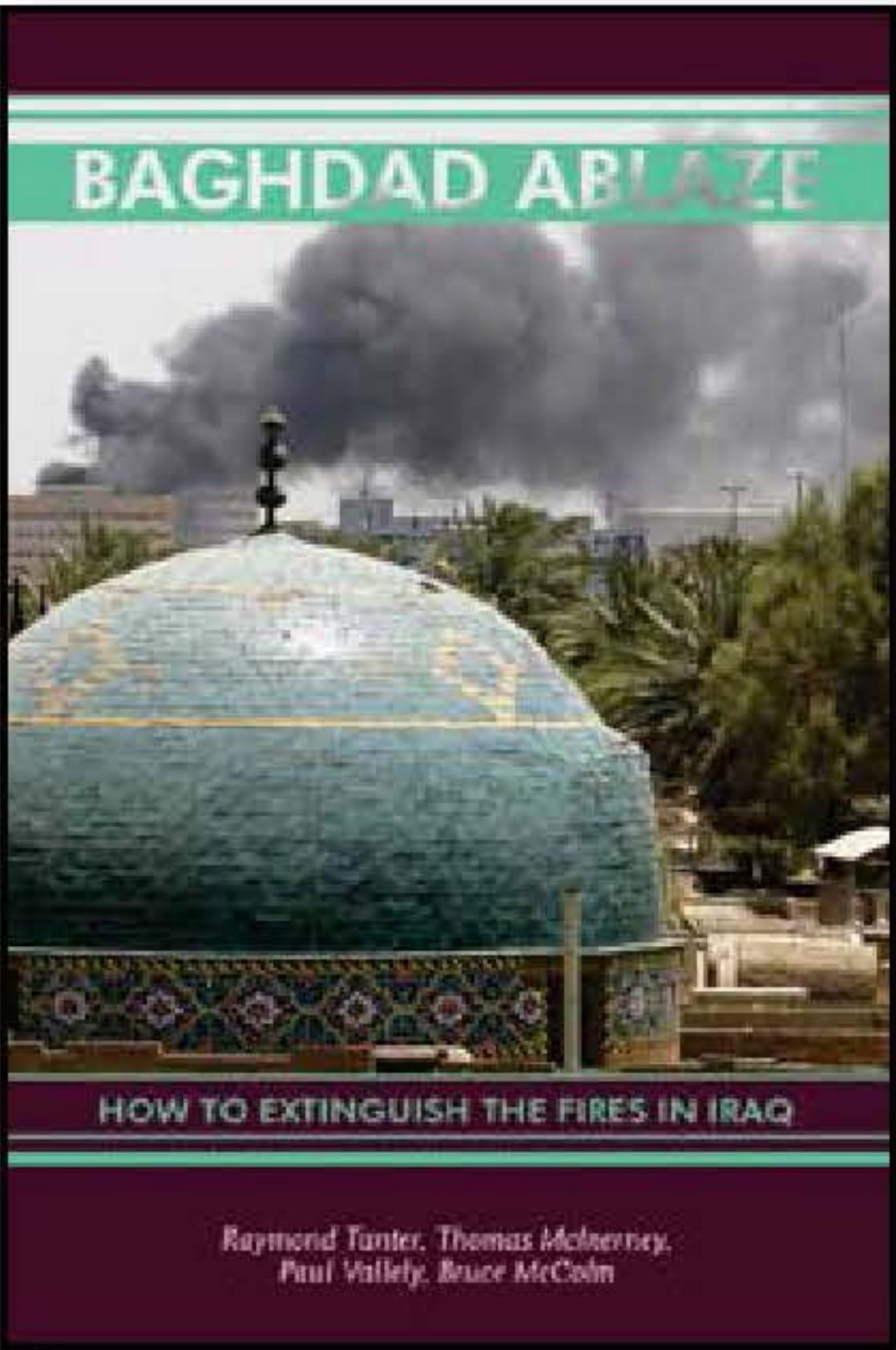
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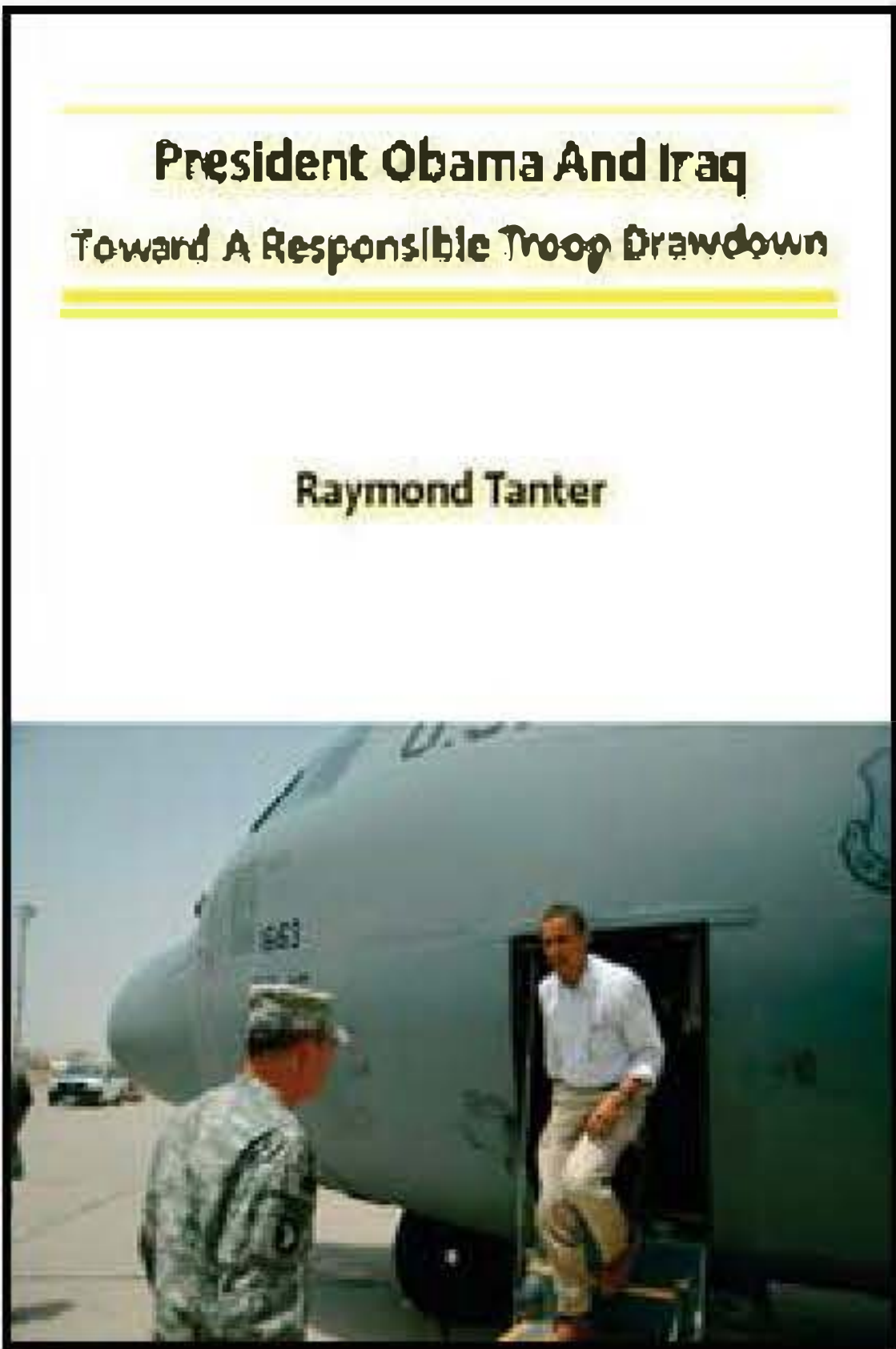
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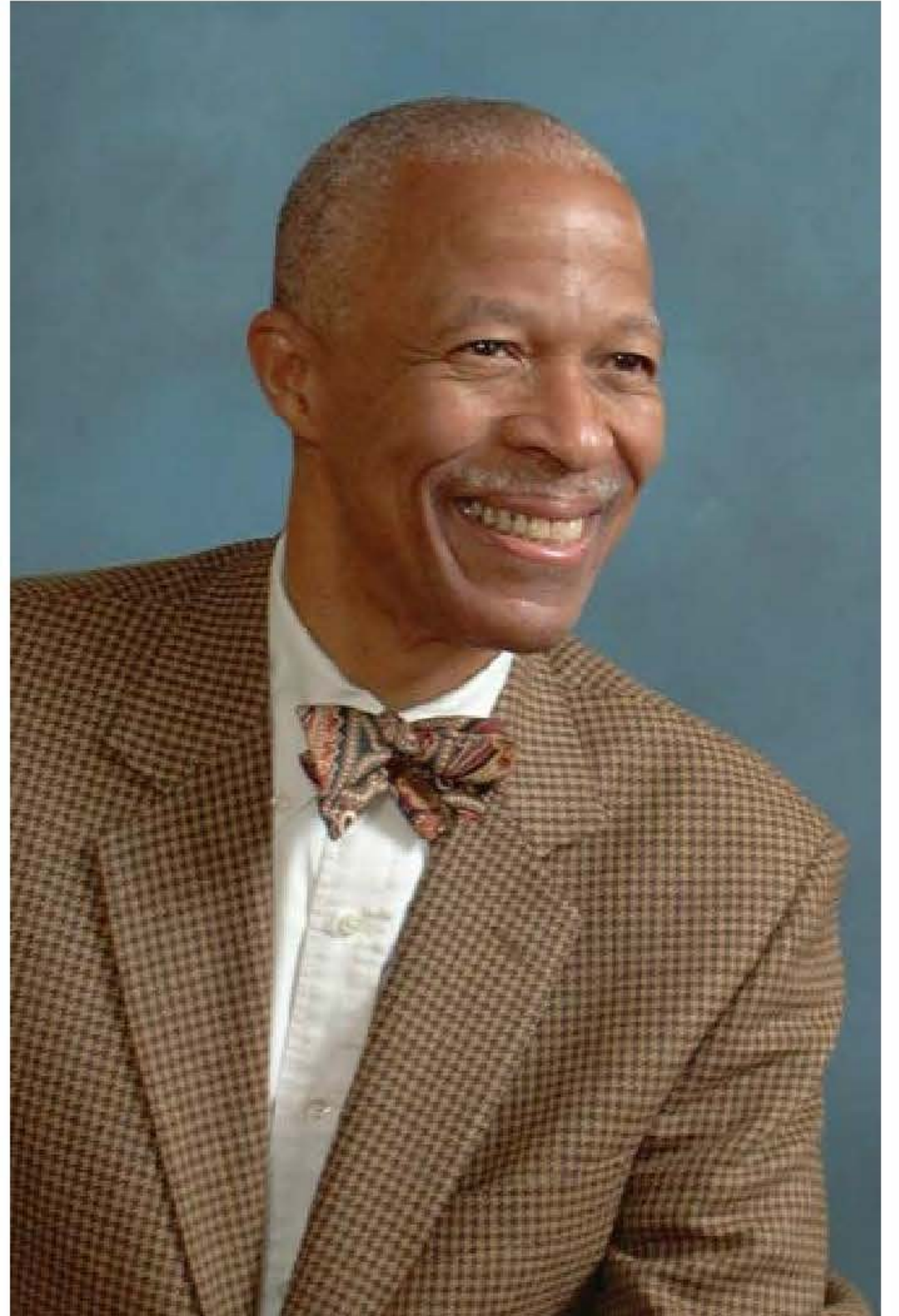


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