

Policy Initiative on Iran

Breaking the Stalemate, Engaging with the Iranian Opposition

June 13, 2015

With a long history of serving the American people and the U.S. national interest, we stand together today to call for a new approach in our country's policy toward Iran and the Iranian opposition.

Ours is an independent initiative, motivated by our concerns for United States national security, as well as justice and opportunity for millions of Arab and Persian citizens whose futures are being shaped by current events, and the unending suffering of the Iranian people, who have been deprived of their most fundamental rights for over 35 years under the tyrannical regime ruling Iran.

We are also concerned about the safety and security of the approximately 2,500 Iranian opposition members trapped in Camp Liberty in Iraq, whom our government, through its military, has pledged in writing to protect. Their safety while being processed for onward relocation by the United Nations remains a moral obligation for the United States, arising not only from our written guarantee but also from the valuable help and intelligence – including information about Iran's nuclear program – provided by these opposition members. Our country's failure to uphold its solemn promises to these defenseless men and women is inexcusable, and is a by-product of our government's misreading of the Iranian regime's intentions.

We are united in our understanding of the nature of the regime in Iran, a subject about which many of our colleagues in Washington seem uncertain. While we share the goal of seeking an end to Iran's nuclear weapons activities through diplomacy if such an outcome can be negotiated, we believe it is a mistake for Iran's actions in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere to be overlooked, minimized, excused or even welcomed. We also believe it will better serve our country's interests to pay closer attention to the human rights and aspirations of the Iranian people.

Today we call for an end to the misguided position of those in Washington who seek to isolate, exclude or otherwise ignore Iran's largest, most established and best organized political opposition, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, led by Mrs. Maryam Rajavi. In recent years we have come to know Mrs. Rajavi and the NCRI, and we know the resistance far better than many in Washington who believe that the NCRI should be kept at arm's length for one reason or another.

We call as well for immediate pressure by our government on the government of Iraq, which depends on United States military and financial aid, to end the systematic torment of the MEK members still in Iraq that has thus far resulted in 142 deaths (101 outright murdered, 15 victims of rocket attacks, and 26 denied access to proper medical treatment) and the ongoing denial of livable health, sanitary and nutrition conditions. This cessation of harassment should be followed immediately by their physical removal from Iraq to countries in which Iranian opposition members are already leading productive lives, including the United States.

Mrs. Rajavi's steadfast message, to political and religious leaders around the world over a period of many years, is a 10-point plan for the future of Iran that would resolve Iran's most dangerous and destabilizing challenges. The plan would restore political legitimacy through universal suffrage, guarantee rights for all citizens and particularly women and minorities, end the cruel excesses of the judiciary and establish the rule of law, end the nightmare of fundamentalist Islamic dictatorship by once again separating church and state, protect property rights, promote equal opportunity and environmental

protections, and – last but certainly not least – seek a non-nuclear Iran, free of weapons of mass destruction. The idea that Washington should continue in 2015 to disregard a worldwide group of Iranians promoting such a platform is indefensible. The United States should be maintaining a vibrant and constant dialogue with the National Council of Resistance of Iran.

It is by now beyond dispute that the regime in Tehran is fomenting instability and conflict throughout the region, most notably in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq. Its campaign to undermine stability was launched because the regime sought to enhance its influence throughout the region and because it feared the emergence of more open political systems in nearby countries that could revive the democratic forces behind the Persian Spring of 2009. Iran shares responsibility for the rise of ISIS; this phenomenon was cynically facilitated by Syrian dictator Bashar al Assad and then-Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq to divert the focus from their own divisive sectarian actions, supported by Iran, about which we have repeatedly warned in previous years.

Iran's regime has sustained a leader in Damascus guilty of major war crimes against his own people and in defiance of a Presidential "red line," a UN-brokered transition process and the united stance of Arab League governments insisting on his departure. It has supplied military-grade weapons to Hizballah, a Lebanese non-state actor with the blood of American diplomats and Marines on its hands. It has supported and led sectarian militias in Iraq assaulting Sunni villages and towns. It has provided long-range rockets to Hamas in Gaza to be aimed at population centers in Israel, destabilizing efforts at a negotiated two-state solution. And it has supplied arms, explosives and funds to an insurgent group in Yemen that has driven out foreign Embassies, including our own, seized power and provoked a new regional military conflict.

In all of these actions, while the US Administration has exercised restraint in the apparent hope of moderating Iran's behavior, Iran's leaders have shown nothing but contempt for longstanding American, European and Arab interests throughout the Middle East. They have also clearly demonstrated that money is no object in their efforts to quell popular movements for more open and democratic governance, both domestically and in neighboring Arab countries.

Inside Iran, while many Americans have for years detected signs of moderation, the regime has become, if anything, more repressive since Hassan Rouhani became President in 2013. Imprisonment and executions have increased. Information, including access to the internet, radio and television as well as social media, are now substantially controlled by the Revolutionary Guards. The 2013 elections were carefully managed by the regime to avoid a repeat of the open rebellion in the streets in 2009, after which many were executed and more have been imprisoned.

The editors of The Washington Post, writing about its reporter, whom they say is "entirely innocent of the charges" for which he has been imprisoned in Iran since July of 2014, write that this "blatant abuse of the human rights of an American journalist" raises "disturbing questions about a regime that Mr. Obama is counting on to implement a complex and multifaceted accord limiting its nuclear activities." The Post editors ask, "If [Foreign Minister] Zarif and President Hassan Rouhani either countenance or cannot stop such blatantly provocative behavior by the Iranian intelligence services and judiciary, how can they be expected to overcome the entrenched resistance to limiting Iran's uranium enrichment?"

We share these concerns. We also recognize that the fundamentalist regime in Tehran, in violating so many norms of political governance and international behavior since the 1979 revolution, survives not through the ballot box but only by absolute suppression and its false claim to religious authority – a formula which has now been repeated by Sunni extremists attempting to create an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. No one should misunderstand why the National Council of Resistance of Iran is the single

entity feared most by the rulers in Tehran: it is because the MEK and NCRI directly challenge the religious claim of authority that the mullahs have used to exercise and maintain political power.

The ayatollahs' thirty-five-year war against the MEK and the NCRI; the repeated deadly assaults against the residents of Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty; their intelligence services' covert influence and propaganda campaigns against the Resistance in Western countries; their constant diplomatic requests over the past two decades for the US, France and other governments to place the MEK on their lists of terrorist organizations; their confiscation of satellite dishes and jamming of Iran National TV signals reaching the population inside Iran; their arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and execution of anyone supporting the Resistance – all these aspects of the regime's obsessive focus on the Resistance are due to one fact.

This is not about terrorism, not about culture, not about the Iran-Iraq war or the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War. All the propaganda generated by the regime to defame and criminalize the Resistance has now been exposed, and the NCRI has challenged every terrorist listing and won. No, this obsession of the mullahs with the Resistance is about Islam, and the desire of millions of Iranians to exercise their faith while living in a modern society with higher education, and economic and political empowerment for women and men alike. The concept of *Velayat e-faqih* in the new regime's constitution – forcefully imposed by Ayatollah Khomeini after the fall of the Shah to place total religious and political power in the hands of one man – has been a disaster for the Iranian people, for Iran and for the world. You will not hear any debate in Washington that ISIS must be stopped; it is high time Americans also recognized that if ISIS succeeds, what the world will get is a Sunni version of Khomeini's Iran.

We recommend the following four initiatives to our government and to presidential candidates and prospective candidates in both parties, aimed at de-escalating conflict throughout the Middle East, in part by recognizing these realities, standing for American principles and basic international norms, and opposing the destructive role of Iran in the region.

First, on the nuclear issue, we support a peaceful solution if it can be achieved through diplomacy. However, we strongly believe that such a solution cannot be achieved by making concessions to Iran but rather by making clear that Iran will be denied any potential opportunity to obtain a nuclear bomb. Iran under the ayatollahs has consistently shown that it cannot be trusted. Verification, not blind trust in the Iranian government to fulfill conditions of the agreement, must be an unconditional reality. Furthermore, western negotiators must clarify what is meant by Possible Military Dimension (PMD) activities of Iran before a comprehensive deal can be signed.

Second, Iran's destructive role throughout the region must be curbed and deterred. Far from being part of the solution, Iran is a major part of the problem. There should be no direct or indirect cooperation with Iran under the pretext of fighting ISIS. Iran has been a major engine of the spread of Islamic extremism and fundamentalism. It is globally recognized to be the primary state sponsor of terrorism. The success of a long-term stabilization strategy in the region hinges on ending Iran's cynical and destructive meddling in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon and other countries.

Third, we should be more vigilant and vocal about the serious human rights abuses by the regime that continue inside Iran. Our policy on Iran's internal and external transgressions against universal international norms can no longer be held hostage to the nuclear issue. Indeed, our failure to stand for basic principles and rights only encourages the regime to violate them further with impunity. Nuclear negotiations, which many have taken as an indication of moderation within the theocratic regime, must not inadvertently provide it an undeserved veneer of legitimacy and abet its suppression of the Iranian people. During Mr. Rouhani's tenure as President, the human rights situation in Iran has measurably

deteriorated while illicit arms trafficking and support for terrorist non-state actors has continued unabated. A successful policy toward Iran and the Middle East cannot be based on denial of these realities.

Ultimately, the core of our approach is to side with 80 million Iranian people and their desire, along with people everywhere, for freedom and popular sovereignty based on democratic principles. Engaging with the democratic opposition has been the missing piece of US policy for many years under both Republican and Democratic leadership. Thus, as our fourth initiative, we call on our government to break the stalemate and engage in respectful dialogue with the Iranian opposition, consistent with our country's policy of dialogue with all political groups. Whatever the outcome of nuclear negotiations and in virtually any possible scenario, the wishes of the Iranian people and their desire for change must be taken into consideration.

The fact is that Washington officials, experts and expatriates cannot possibly know what Iranians living under a violently repressive dictatorship truly believe about their circumstances or whom they would support in an open political process. We disrespect a great people by assuming that a democratic and non-nuclear Iran is impossible. It is not impossible; to the contrary, it is the only way to a future of regional stability.

Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, as a Muslim woman advocating a tolerant and democratic interpretation of Islam enabling Muslims to be accepted and respected by all cultures and faiths, represents the very opposite of the misogynous Iranian regime's dictatorial nature and that of all Islamic fundamentalists and extremists. We need to align our policies with our principles, and begin listening to the voices of brave Iranians, many of whom have waited more than three decades, as their loved ones endured torture and death in the mullahs' prisons, still believing in the promise of America. All of us here today stand with them in solidarity with their deepest aspirations for a respectable, just and democratic Iranian government worthy of its people.

Hon. J. Kenneth Blackwell – Former U.S. Ambassador, UN Human Rights Commission

Hon. Marc Ginsberg - Former U.S. Ambassador to Morocco

Brig. Gen. (Ret.) David D. Phillips – Former US Military Commander For Camp Ashraf

Hon. Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Former Special Envoy and Asst Sec State

Hon. Rudy Giuliani - Former NYC Mayor, Presidential Candidate

Hon. Mitchell B. Reiss (Ret.) - Former Ambassador, Former Special Envoy to the Northern Ireland Peace Process

Hon. John Bolton- Former U.S. Ambassador to the UN

Hon. Porter Goss - Former Director of CIA, Former Chairman of House Intel Committee

Hon. Edward Rendell - Former PA Governor, DNC Chairman

Colonel (Ret.) Thomas V. Cantwell, Former US Military Commander for Camp Ashraf

Hon. Newt Gingrich – Former Speaker of the House

Hon. Bill Richardson – Former NM Governor, Secretary of Energy, UN Ambassador, Presidential Candidate

Hon. Glenn Carle
Former Deputy National
Intelligence Officer for Transnational
Threats, National Intelligence Council

General George Casey - Former U.S.
Army Chief of Staff and Commander of
Multi-National Forces – Iraq

Hon. Linda Chavez -Former Assistant
to the President For Public Liaison;
Chairman of the Center for Equal
Opportunity

Gen. (Ret.) James Conway – Former
Commandant U.S. Marine Corps

Hon. Howard Dean - Former VT
Governor, DNC Chairman, Presidential
Candidate

Dr. Alan Dershowitz, Professor of Law
Harvard Law School

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) David Deptula –
Former Deputy COS For Intel,
Surveillance, and Reconnaissance,
U.S. Air Force

Hon. Paula J. Dobriansky – Former
Under Secretary of State for Democracy
and Global Affairs

Hon. Louis J. Freeh – Former Director
FBI

General (Ret.) *James L. Jones* -
Former USMC Commandant,
NATO Commander, National
Security Advisor to the President

Hon. Robert Joseph
Former Under Secretary of State
for Arms Control and International
Security

Hon. Patrick Kennedy – Former
Rhode Island Congressman

Hon. Joseph I. Lieberman –
Former Connecticut Senator

*Colonel (Ret.), U.S. Army Wesley
M. Martin* – Former US Military
Commander for Camp Ashraf,
Senior Antiterrorism Officer – Iraq

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Leo McCloskey –
Former US Military Commander
For Camp Ashraf

Hon. R. Bruce McColm -
President, Institute for Democratic
Strategies

Colonel (Ret.) Gary Morsch -
Former Senior U.S. Army Medical
Officer, Camp Ashraf

Hon. Michael B. Mukasey -
Former US Attorney General

Hon. Tom Ridge – Former PA Governor,
Secretary Homeland Security

Hon. John Sano - Former Deputy
Director CIA National Clandestine
Service

General (Ret.) Hugh Shelton- Former
Chairman of US Joint Chiefs of Staff

Hon. Eugene R. Sullivan – Retired
Federal Judge, Lt. Colonel (Ret.), U.S.
Army

Hon. Raymond Tanter - Former Personal
Representative of Secretary of Defense to
Arms Control Negotiations

Hon. Robert Torricelli - Former NJ
Senator

Hon. Frances Townsend – Former
Homeland Security Advisor to the
President

General (Ret.) Charles (Chuck) Wald-
Former Deputy Commander U.S.
European Command