

# IRAN: THE NUCLEAR THREAT AND BEYOND



**SUMMARY OF A ROUNDTABLE**  
*(Including Policy Recommendations)*

HELD IN  
NEW YORK CITY

*September 7, 2006*

## *Our Mission*

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy was founded in 1974 by Professor Hans J. Morgenthau and others. It is a nonprofit activist organization dedicated to the resolution of conflicts that threaten U.S. interests. Toward that end, the National Committee identifies, articulates, and helps advance American foreign policy interests from a nonpartisan perspective within the framework of political realism.

American foreign policy interests include

- preserving and strengthening national security;
- supporting countries committed to the values and the practice of political, religious, and cultural pluralism;
- improving U.S. relations with the developed and developing worlds;
- advancing human rights;
- encouraging realistic arms-control agreements;
- curbing the proliferation of nuclear and other unconventional weapons;
- promoting an open and global economy.

Believing that an informed public is vital to a democratic society, the National Committee offers educational programs that address security challenges facing the United States and publishes a variety of publications, including its bimonthly journal, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, that present keen analyses of all aspects of American foreign policy.



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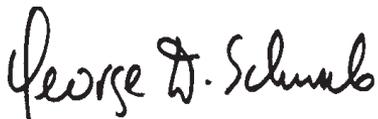
Dear Reader:

On September 7, 2006, the National Committee on American Foreign Policy convened its sixth closed-door and off-the-record roundtable on the Middle East. The topic addressed was “Iran: The Nuclear Threat and Beyond.”

Like its predecessors, this roundtable was conceived and guided by Ambassador Fereydoun Hoveyda, the NCAFP’s project director for the Middle East. Because of his illness in September, the ambassador was not able to attend the conference or to review the proceedings edited by Edwina McMahon, senior fellow and associate editor of *American Foreign Policy Interests*. He died in November. Nevertheless, he did reread the NCAFP’s 1997 policy statement on Iran as well as its 2001 revision. As he did so, Ambassador Hoveyda was so struck by its relevance that he expressed the wish to have it reprinted. (Please see the appendix.)

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy is especially grateful to Mutual of America and to its chairman, president, and CEO, Mr. Thomas J. Moran; Mrs. Sheila Johnson Robbins; Mrs. Eugenie Fromer; and Kenneth J. Bialkin, Esq., for providing major support for this roundtable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George D. Schwab". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

George D. Schwab  
President

# INTRODUCTION

The moderator of the day's proceedings in Ambassador Fereydoun Hoveyda's absence presented an overview of the roundtable and the papers that would be given and discussed: two in the morning, a broad commentary and an overview of the final presentation during lunch, and one paper in the afternoon. Employing a medical metaphor, he identified the questions that are implicit in all of the presentations: Is Iran's threat to a healthy regional body politic symptomatic of a migraine, and if so, how to treat it while living with it? Conversely, does it pose a threat similar to that of cancer, and if so, how to prevent it from carrying out its deadly design?

## The Iranian Perspective

In identifying the focus of his paper as an examination of the nuclear issue as well as the defense policies that Iran claims to be implementing, a presenter discussed political factors as well. Acquiring prestige, he said, was a major inducement in Iran's decision to produce enriched uranium. Reinforcing its desire to acquire the peculiar kind of international prestige that comes from being a nuclear power are Iran's anticipation of obtaining the psychological reward of self-confidence that flows from success in mastering nuclear technology and the prospect of recapturing the key role that the country played in the Middle East before the advent of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), as well as assurance that Iran will be the unimpeded beneficiary of an independent source of energy that is not based on oil—a commodity that may be better for Iran to sell than to consume.

The presenter summarized the arguments that Iran has presented to dispute the claim that its enrichment program has been designed to yield weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In essence, he declared, deterrence is the key to Iran's defense policy. By deterrence Iran means self-sufficiency in resources necessary to defend itself against its perceived enemies—the United States and its proxies. Iran does not have an air force, but it does have missiles and claims to have the capability to summon a large army that would fight to defend the homeland.

According to the presenter, Iran's defense strategy is logical and consistent—the opposite of the way it is portrayed in the media. In addition to its supplies of missiles and its ability to field an army, which constitute frontline forms of defense, Iran uses insurgencies, propaganda, and border incidents as means of deterrence. It deploys

such tactics skillfully as it defends its interests in the region and develops its relationships with Pakistan, Afghanistan, the countries of Central Asia, and Iraq.

The inescapable conclusion that emerged from the presentation was that Iran and the United States share one overarching goal in the Middle East: stability. For Iran, stability in the form of a stable polity in Iraq is a desirable objective as long as it does not produce consequences that are contrary to the ideals of the Iranian revolution.

In response to a question, the presenter maintained that it would make no sense at all for the Iranian government to give to rogue states or to groups of terrorists WMDs that would create chaos and undermine stability in the region. The fear of such a giveaway is only that—fear based on anxiety.

### **The Arab Perspective**

In presenting the Arab perspective on the nuclear issue, a presenter stated that the designation “Arab” had to be disaggregated to reflect the fact that there are many Arab points of view on what would happen in the region if Iran were able to produce nuclear weapons as well as assume a dominant role in the Middle East. He characterized Arab perspectives as conflicting and divided along a number of fault lines that separate Arab leaders from one another and from the Arab street. Even the Saudis, the presenter observed, who have always regarded Iran as a threat and a rival, have begun to question their attitude toward Iran. In the summer of 2006, in pursuit of its revolutionary foreign policy, Iran, through its support of Hezbollah, seemed to appropriate the role of the Arabs in their struggle against Israel, achieving for itself in the war in Lebanon perhaps its only revolutionary foreign policy success in almost 30 years. The presenter discussed the apparent alliances formed by Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian territories and the composite threat that those relationships seems to pose to Saudi Arabia where the Muslim Brotherhood branch that operates in the country and claims to subscribe to the revolutionary Wahhabi theology of the ruling Saudis proclaimed its support for Hezbollah. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, a Sunni stronghold, also expressed its support for Hezbollah. To the Saudis, it may seem that their 50-year record of aiding the Muslim Brotherhood has failed.

Its belief that Hezbollah won the war in Lebanon, at least in the realm of symbols and propaganda where a lot of Arab politics takes place, did not convince Saudi Arabia to continue to support the

Muslim Brotherhood. Instead, the Saudis informed their erstwhile beneficiary that they will not receive further assistance for the duration of their alliance with Hamas and Hezbollah. Will the split already evident among the members of Hamas over supporting Hezbollah become manifest outside the Palestinian territories, the presenter asked rhetorically? No one can tell now, he answered. He asserted that the answer, when it becomes evident, will depend on two countries—Iraq and Lebanon. In his judgment, they seem to be the central arena of the conflict among Iran and the three Sunni countries of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. Private discussions with Saudi authorities have revealed, the presenter disclosed, that Saudi Arabia has determined that it can live with a nuclear Iran. The Saudi belief in deterrence appears to be the operative factor in that determination—a judgment buttressed by its alliance with Pakistan.

### **Comments, Questions, and Answers**

A presenter commented that the Arabs vacillate between thinking that the United States will deal directly with an Iran turned nasty and that the United States will cut a deal with Iran behind their backs. In any event, they believe that the resolution of the issue will hinge on two principal players—the United States and Iran.

In response to a series of questions, a presenter reiterated that the perspective reflected in his presentation represented not his own point of view but that of Iran. From that perspective he elaborated on points raised in his paper to address individual questions posed by a number of participants. (1) Iran has no intention of producing enriched uranium to produce nuclear weapons; instead, it is interested in producing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes; supplying nuclear technology, including weaponry, to rogue states or groups of terrorists would confound reason and prevent the fulfillment of Iran's objective of promoting stability in the Middle East; (2) Iran has no quarrel with Israel; Israel has become unpopular in Iran not because of the situation in the Palestinian territories but because of the perception that it is acting as the agent of the United States; some Iranians think that Israel and Iran could enter into a strategic alliance that would prove to be effective; the Iranian president's call for variations on the theme of wiping Israel off the map is a rallying cry in a crude propaganda campaign designed to appeal to the Arab street over the heads of its pro-U.S. governments and thereby achieve the overarching goal of the revolutionary state—assume leadership of Islamic countries—a goal that would otherwise be very difficult for a non-Arab Shiite state to achieve in a region where only 13 percent of the population consists of Shiites;

(3) Iran wants to exercise in the Middle East a role that is commensurate with its perceived power in the region; (4) the Iranian government seeks the removal of all sanctions and restrictions that have been imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran since the seizure of the U.S. embassy in 1979.

A presenter remarked that he does not agree with the presenter's assessment of the reasonableness of Iran's rulers. Pointing to their decisions to supply missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon and improvised explosive devices to the insurgents in Iraq, he cautioned against trusting that the ideological rulers of Iran will suddenly become sensible and observe international law in their dealings with legitimate states, rogue states, and terrorist groups.

A presenter asked about the political leadership of Iran, namely, whom is one speaking of when one says Iran, a country that, unlike its Arab counterparts, has institutions. Obviously, the political climate is diverse, and contenders for power are numerous, imbued with ideology, and determined to prevail. Identifying them may shed light on the country's objectives and the institutional ways that can be used to control their conflicts.

A presenter estimated that thirty groups, each headed by a cleric, provide the leadership cadre in Iran. Beyond the universal leadership objective of preserving the regime, they have goals and interests that conflict with one another's aims. Nevertheless, they come together to make collective decisions that also enhance their individual positions.

A presenter expressed the judgment that the Iranian leaders would use a nuclear weapon if they believed it would forestall the crumbling of the revolutionary regime. Another presenter responded that in his judgment, the leaders are not suicidal. He thinks that if regime change were imminent, they would head for foreign capitals with the capital they had accumulated. In that connection, he referred to the treasure acquired by a past president of Iran who used his position to become the wealthiest man in the country.

A presenter stated that despite the fact that Iran has cheated on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), negotiations rather than penalties have been employed to persuade it to change its behavior and comply with the provisions of the treaty. Furthermore, he wondered why Iran has decided to develop enriched uranium when it does not have a nuclear power station. When the power station built by Russia goes online in March 2007, Russia will be able to

supply all of Iran's needs. The United States-European Union package would give to Iran, within the protocol of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, all of the nuclear-enriched fuel the country needs. One can only question why any country would reject such a beneficial offer.

A participant asked what package of incentives could be offered to Iran to dissuade it from developing the capability to produce nuclear weapons. He mentioned membership in the World Trade Organization, the provision of massive foreign technical know-how, capital investment in petroleum industries, and security guarantees, among other things. Such incentives, he observed, might drive a wedge between the government and the people. A presenter responded that the United States can negotiate only with the government and not with the public. Those negotiations, he continued, could not be conducted in public. He cited education as the first of many such incentives that could be offered to Iran.

A presenter noted that security guarantees were granted to Iran in the Algerian Accords that ended the American hostage crisis in 1981. In fact, he stated, the accords prevent American citizens from suing the Islamic Republic of Iran. According to him, Iran rejected the recent U.S.-E.U. package of incentives not because the proposal failed to enhance its interests as a sovereign state but because it considered them to be inimical to its interests as the embodiment of a revolutionary regime. In his judgment, as long as the revolution's representatives, the clerics who sit atop each echelon of the bureaucracy, continue to rule on behalf of the revolution and are determined to preserve their power against the nation-state and the incipient power of the people, Iran will continue to be a dangerous loose cannon.

A participant asked a presenter to give his personal view, not that of the Iranian government, of why Iran would support a democracy in Iraq. The presenter focused on the cultural composition of the Iraqi population: 60 percent are Shiites, and probably from 20 to 25 percent of the Kurds in Iraq have an ethnic affinity with the Persians of Iran. The presence of similar cultural groups in a nearby state may enlist the Iranian people's support for a political situation in Iraq that would conduce to the benefit of the Iraqi people. Conversely, it might generate their opposition to a development that could lead to the eruption of civil war or to the breakup of the state, the flow of refugees into Iran, and instability in the region.

In commenting on the last answer, a presenter reiterated the

distinction between Iran as a sovereign state and Iran as a revolution. If it functioned as a sovereign state, Iran would welcome Iraq as a stable, free democratic neighbor that promotes stability in the region. As a revolution, he asserted, Iran does not welcome a democratic Iraq whose new government, political parties, and media contrast with the IRI's cleric-dominated, ideological, repressive political system.

A participant asked how to interpret the Iranian president's remarks about Israel. What, she asked, did a particular presenter think of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He replied that although the president's behavior is embarrassing, he is not stupid. President Ahmadinejad has targeted a specific audience whom he hopes to mobilize in his behalf. Instead of focusing on the intellectuals or others who live and work in the cities of Iran, he addresses the peasants and the workers in his drive to get elected and become the leader of the Islamic world. Living in rural areas of Iran, they understand economic development in a limited way as revenues derived from the sale of oil. Consequently, Ahmadinejad has tailored his message to reinforce their perceptions and to appeal to their parochial interests.

A participant asked a presenter to assess the nature of the enmity between the Shia and the Sunni and the extent to which their animosity affects U.S. policymaking. The presenter replied that in most countries in which the Sunnis constitute a majority, there was no enmity toward the Shia until the war in Iraq because there was little interaction between the adherents of the two strains of Islam. As examples he cited the Palestinians, who are Sunni, as well as Jordan. Syria, personified by the ruling Alawites, he stated, presents a different profile of believers, as do the adherents of Wahhabism practiced by the royal family of Saudi Arabia and their Sunni subjects. In essence, there are two countries in which Islam is atypical, namely, Syria, where the rulers subscribe to the Alawite strain, considered heretical by Shiites, and Saudi Arabia, where hatred for Shiites and a spirit of anti-Shiism animate all who practice Wahhabism. In Lebanon and Egypt, in contrast, there was no enmity between the Sunnis and the Shiites until the war. The presenter asserted that because of the influence of Al Qaeda or Wahhabism or both, anti-Shiism is spreading throughout the region. He offered the ironic conclusion that one of the ways to weaken Iran's influence in the region and diminish the influence of Shiism in the Middle East would be to promote Qaedalike groups. Similarly, the way to weaken Hezbollah, undermine its victory in Lebanon, and counter its ability to forge an alliance with Sunnis would be to provoke the involvement of Al Qaeda.

Additional unintended consequences of the war in Iraq were

identified in the next exchange between a participant who cautioned against giving away too much during negotiations and a presenter. Doing so, the participant stated, would provide incentives to others to engage in hostile or threatening acts to secure a seat at the negotiating table. The presenter stated that the decision to possess nuclear capability is popular with the Iranian people who believe that all great nations such as theirs are entitled to possess all available technological advances that convey a status of superiority among nations. Had Saddam Hussein possessed nuclear weapons, the presenter averred, his country would not have been invaded. Other states such as Iran have drawn the logical conclusion that possessing nuclear weapons will prevent both a preemptive attack and regime change.

Why, a presenter wondered, would any democratic state want to invade Iraq or Iran. Does any state want to invade Switzerland or 21st-century Poland, he asked rhetorically? He cautioned against assuming that the interests of such regimes as Iran are as legitimate as their interests of state.

A participant asked a particular presenter whether he shared his view that the U.S. presence in Iraq is preventing Iran from becoming a hegemon in the region. The presenter voiced his agreement.

In response to a participant's question about whether the presenters considered the differences between Iran and the United States to be a cultural clash, a presenter responded that he did and that the nature of the struggle accounted for its intractability. He stated what it was not about—not about territory, influence, and access to natural resources and markets and other things of concrete value. Just as it is a clash of cultures, it is a clash of visions—President Bush's vision of the Middle East versus President Ahmadinejad's vision of the region.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the presenter asserted, should not be dismissed. He is a proponent of the very strong ideological movement known as Khomeinism that controls the Iranian state apparatus. Iran's geostrategic position accounts for its potential power. Located between the Caspian Basin and the Persian Gulf, Iran possesses an abundance of natural resources such as oil and gas. It is using those resources to advance its ideological goals. Two conflicting messianic strains exist in Islam. The adherents of one are waiting for the imman to come back. Therefore, they show no loyalty to any regime. The exponents of the other, which calls itself the hasteners, engage in provocative acts and provoke

conflict and chaos designed to convince the imman to return right away to establish peace. President Ahmadinejad belongs to the hastener branch.

He continued by relating that in November there will be an election of the Assembly of Experts that will choose the supreme leader who has virtually unlimited power under the Iranian constitution. If the president's group wins a majority, Ahmadinejad and his followers would be in a position to choose the next supreme guide of Iran from its own ranks.

A participant asked whether the United States could bring about peaceful regime change in Iran by generating pressure within the country. A presenter stated that unless the present revolutionary leadership trains a group to secede it, the regime will die out. He referred to recent polls that revealed that an overwhelming number of Iranians who are 30 years old or younger—a majority of the population—don't want anything to do with the revolution. He singled out special provisions that have been made to obtain an American education (considered advantageous by Iranian youth) that would result in American degrees being issued by non-American universities and the legitimizing effects of elections that are likely to proliferate and become less constrained as Iranian voters return to the polls to record their choices for government offices and to support the fledgling process of democracy.

A participant returned to the question of the Shia versus the Sunni and the possibility that either branch would enter into an alliance with Al Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, or Hezbollah against the interests of Saudi Arabia. After explaining why he thought it possible that Al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood might work together under certain circumstances, a presenter stated that he considered it very unlikely that Al Qaeda and the Shiites would work together because the second generation of Al Qaeda leaders have declared the Shia to be enemies of Islam. The presenter stated that the Muslim Brotherhood, perhaps as a consequence of adopting the tactic of seeking power through elections, has declared that attempts to overturn the government of Egypt are illegitimate. On the ground, however, things are different. One can observe the working relationship established between Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Hezbollah. He recommended that outsiders, including the United States, not take sides in the theological debates raging between the Shiia and the Sunnis. Instead, the United States should assess the consequences of ideological conflict on power politics in the region.

A participant asked a particular presenter to suggest how to deal with Iran's financing of insurgencies in the region and to relate whether Syria was providing the same kind of assistance. The presenter replied that intervening to end such support would be a very expensive way of trying to resolve the problem, doing nothing would be a very unsatisfactory reaction, and trying to understand the reasons behind the decision to support an insurgency may be the best approach by default. For example, Iran's support of Israel's enemy Hezbollah in Lebanon was based on the strategic consideration that should the Israeli air force, against which Iran has no defense, decide to take out Iran's nuclear facilities, Hezbollah would strike a retaliatory blow against Israel. The threat of such a scenario amounts to deterrence of a different stripe.

The presenter remarked that a number of factors influenced Iran's decision to fund insurgencies—a decision that seems flawed when one realizes that Israel was not regarded until recently as Iran's enemy. In fact, most of the Iranian people do not support their president's attempts to recast Israel in that role. The presenter's analysis of the situation has led him to conclude that Khomeinist Iran fears the reemergence of Iraq as an alternative center of Shia power.

A presenter turned his attention to Syria and the Alawite heretical group that governs there. The legitimacy of the regime comes from its success in maintaining itself as a frontline state in the war against Israel, imperialism, and the West, as well as regimes such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan that are willing to make deals with the West. The official ideology of the Syrian regime is Baathist, making it the proponents of a fascist Arab nationalist ideology that practically no one in Syria believes in or supports. Hence the regime feels threatened. As a consequence, Syria has struck alliances with Hezbollah, Hamas, Iran, and elements of Al Qaeda in Lebanon.

A participant asked a presenter to elaborate on the Algerian Accords by describing the kinds of sanctions that were imposed, assessing their effectiveness, and discussing whether the prospect of removing them might spur the Iranians to enter into negotiations with the West. The presenter replied that the Algerian Accords, as modified in the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, contain the U.S. promise that any company that invests more than 25 million dollars and, later, 40 million dollars in the Iranian energy sector will not be allowed to invest and trade in U.S. markets. He stated that they have not been applied uniformly, allowing many European companies as well as a number of subsidiaries of Halliburton to do business in Iran. As the leading topic on the prospective agenda that

Iran issued in response to a proposal initiated by the Clinton administration during the Khatami presidency was a Yaltalike deal that would have divided the Middle East into specific spheres of influence controlled by Iran such as Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq and specific spheres under the influence of the United States such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt. The proposal appeared to be based on the concept of containment that prevailed during the cold war. That could be option one. Another option would be for the United States and Iran to work together in a condominium kind of arrangement in the region. Such a development, he stated, might not be acceptable to Turkey, Israel, the Arabs, the Pakistanis, and others. The third option, he asserted, is regime change, an undertaking that need not be accomplished immediately by invasion but by taking a resolute stand against negotiating with a regime that is an implacable enemy. The presenter declared that he is opposed to symbolic sanctions because they do not work. So too is he opposed to “Salvation Army” solutions designed to provide educational assistance and other kinds of socioeconomic aid. He voiced the judgment that Iran’s economy is not thriving because states and nonstate investors do not want to incur the risk of investing in the Islamic Republic of Iran while its quarrel with the United States is extant. In any event, the pseudo-Marxist argument that postulates the primacy of providing economic aid elevates economics over politics. If that approach prevails, it will do nothing to alleviate the problems of the Middle East, which are essentially political in nature and require political solutions.

During lunch a presenter focused on illuminating the relationship between the Shia and the Sunni. Statistics relating to the sizable presence of Sunnis in Iran (2 million of a total population of 12 million in the capital and 10 million of about 70 million in the country as a whole) and the absence of Sunni mosques and officeholders throughout the Islamic Republic of Iran testify to the rampant discrimination practiced in the country. The same situation obtains in Egypt, though there the Shiites, not the Sunnis, are the objects of discrimination and in some cases persecution. Recently the situation has improved in Saudi Arabia where Sunnis have been appointed as token members of parliament, as ministers, and as ambassadors. A presenter recommended that the United States not get involved in this historic conflict among Muslims in the region.

Another presenter agreed that American involvement in sectarian issues would be unwise but stated that the United States has no alternative. U.S. involvement, however, should be limited to, say, telling its ally Saudi Arabia that it favors or rejects a specific kind of

sectarian propaganda initiative.

The moderator related that in conformity with the principle that Muslims of one strain cannot make an agreement with those of another strain or with nonbelievers that can last more than 10 years, the London Accords of 1996 between the Shia and the Sunni of Saudi Arabia are now defunct. Consequently, from their place of exile in London, the Saudi Shiites have resumed publishing their antiregime attacks against the Saudi rulers. He stated that thanks to the United States, the Shiites are in power in Iraq for the first time; also, they are in government—both in the ministries and in parliament—in Afghanistan as a consequence of the U.S. intervention to root out the Taliban.

A presenter answered a question relating to the fact that money and oil are fueling conflict in the Middle East. He discussed the fact that the industry required comparatively few employees and created a dependent population. He reported that 53 percent of the Iranian population is on the government payroll. In effect, oil has proved to be a curse rather than a solution to the economic problems of Iran.

A participant raised the issue of how petrodollars are spent to purchase weaponry to prosecute the Arab-Israeli conflict and not to build schools, hospitals, and housing. A presenter elaborated on the comment that the way in which oil revenue is spent is a curse. He maintained that it decouples the relationship between effort and reward that results from, say, building infrastructure and other public goods that conduce to everyone's benefit. He stated that Saudis do not need to be innovative, efficient, industrious, and entrepreneurial. The desire to develop such attributes and employ them in a country where there is no satisfactory work to do inevitably leads to lassitude, frustration, and the desire to emigrate. In essence, he asserted, a country awash in oil revenues that are used to enable workers to live without effort on largesse dispensed by the government anesthetizes potentially productive people into accepting their status as useless and habituates them to believe that they are without merit.

Oil revenues, the presenter said, exert the same effect on politics. In his judgment, petrodollars have played a very important role in financing insurgencies fomented and fought by paramilitary forces. For example, subsidies provided by Iran from its oil revenues have enabled Hezbollah to buy arms and other material.

A presenter commented that the proposal made by the Saudi king in

2002 is worth pursuing. In fact, he said, it can be said that the Saudis are leading the Arabs toward a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He expanded on the concept that people are useless in oil-producing societies other than Norway, which happens to be a developed country in the West. Just as people are not needed to work in oil-producing countries in the Middle East, they are not needed to vote and they are not needed to pay taxes. Taking Saudi Arabia as an example, he stated that the government imports foreign workers at a cost equivalent to one third of its oil income and relies on the United States to defend the country. A government that does not need people can act despotically when it decides to do something, especially export revolution and its peculiar brand of Islam.

A participant observed that dictators do not build schools because educating people is not in their interest. A presenter added that the obsession with Israel and anti-Americanism is a middle-class phenomenon in the Middle East that appeals to the educated elite in Arab countries. The obsession reflects the clash of two ideological, subjective visions.

The subject of oil broadened to include a description of an alternative plan developed by Kazakhstan to keep oil revenues separate from treasury receipts and comments about the woeful condition of the oil fields in Iran, the role played by China in trying to secure its oil needs, and the question of whether Iran will build a pipeline carrying natural gas through Pakistan and into India.

### **The Emerging Democracy Movement**

A presenter spoke about democracy in Iran from the perspective of nonviolent struggle—a strategy that he endorses in his work with Iranian youth. He related that despite its status as the second-largest oil producer and the possessor of the largest oil reserves in the world, Iran is afflicted with unemployment, inflation, insufficient economic growth, social tensions, a brain drain, and a propensity toward disaster, as implicit in its death rate from road accidents that exceeds that of any other country. Its rate of incarceration is second to China's, and, unlike every other country in the world, it imposes the death penalty on juveniles. Its minority non-Persian population contains a number of ethnic groups, including the second-largest number of Jews outside the region, as well as a number of refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq. Dates crucial to the Islamic Republic of Iran are 1953, when oil was nationalized and a U.S.-sponsored coup took place; 1963, when Ayatollah Khomeini became the leader of the Islamic revolution that established itself in Qom; 1979, when the

Islamic Republic was established; 1980, when the Iran-Iraq War began; 1995, when the reformers came to power; 2006, when the reform movement failed and a paramilitary state was established under President Ahmadinejad.

In the presenter's judgment, the social and economic crises in Iran provide a context for analyzing the emerging democracy movement in the country. If it is to succeed, it must undermine the pillars of support that empower the regime, namely the supreme leader or guide who is at the pinnacle of power in the Islamic Republic of Iran; the judiciary; the Islamic Revolutionary Guards and Special Forces; the police; and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, as well as the parallel security apparatus.

In essence, the supreme leader is accountable to no one. The revolution, in the presenter's estimation, has exerted the greatest effect on the judiciary. Since its takeover by the clergy, the judiciary has been severely impaired.

When the Islamic Revolutionary Guards and Special Forces, which number 350,000, are augmented by family and friends, they appear to be a formidable force marching in the streets to show their support for a supposedly popular government.

Supplementing the regular military is the force known as the Islamic Revolutionary Guards. It is nominally subordinate to the minister of defense but is actually controlled by the supreme leader. Like their former Revolutionary Guard cohort, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, they are also members of parliament.

Since the regular police and the revolutionary police were combined, the force totals about 40,000. It includes border patrol personnel and antiriot police and Unit 110, which the presenter identified as being of particular interest to him. To counter the adverse reactions to male police beating up women whose crimes involved not covering their hair completely or using cellphones as they walked on the city streets of Iran, women were recruited to join the ranks. They have shown no reluctance to accost and arrest women presenting themselves in public in a manner deemed to be beyond the pale of fundamentalist Islamic deportment for women.

In the presenter's judgment, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security is smarter and more effective than SAVAK, the shah's Secret Service that it replaced, and much better equipped and trained as well. Its members appear to be everywhere. They can be

found abroad too where they work with de facto expatriates to carry out assassinations and other criminal acts orchestrated by the leaders of Iran. The financial resources of the ministry primarily come from the office of the supreme leader.

Three dates have assumed significance in the history of the emerging democracy movement: July 8, 1999, the winter of 2005, and June 2006, when students, workers, and women demonstrated in support of human rights. They are augmented by university graduates who have organized themselves into a bloc and religious and ethnic minorities. The main weakness of all of the groups is the lack of leadership and organizational skills.

Among the issues that the presenter addressed were nuclear technology as a security issue and nuclear technology as a technology issue. He maintained that as far as the former issue is concerned, Iran prefers to be North Korea, which was not invaded, rather than Iraq, which was. The issue of technology, according to the presenter, reveals how different President Ahmadinejad and other Iranian Islamic fundamentalists are from conservative, traditional fundamentalists who reject technology. Ahmadinejad and his cohorts are like fascists in their fascination with technology and their desire to acquire it. Their problem with the issue of nuclear technology as a national right relates to their reluctance to embrace its underlying spirit of nationalism. Islamists who seek an Islamic empire are uncomfortable advocating nationalism.

According to the presenter, two aspects of nuclear technology have been neglected by those who are spearheading the democracy movement: nuclear technology as an economic issue and nuclear technology as an environmental issue. He singled out the diversion to technology of money that could have been used to create jobs, fight inflation, stimulate economic growth, and prevent health crises. The possibility of nuclear accidents and the mismanagement of nuclear facilities are also issues of concern.

In concluding his presentation, the presenter stated that a military intervention would have a significant negative impact on the democracy movement in Iran at least in the short term. The long-term results, he stated, would be quite unpredictable.

A presenter, in noting that U.S. labor unions and other interest groups had done virtually nothing to support workers in Iran, stated that ways of dealing with the Iranian regime were not limited to bringing about regime change or doing nothing. There are other

options that involve extending support to the emerging democracy movement in Iran.

A presenter answered a question about the kinds of concrete support that the West can provide. He singled out the use of an effective tactic such as pressuring the regime on two fronts—political and economic. The presenter cited the assassinations of Iranian Kurdish leaders that occurred in 1992 in a small restaurant in Berlin. The murdered leaders were in the German capital to attend an International Socialist conference. A German court called for the arrest of the Iranian minister of intelligence and played a role in the indictment of the supreme leader and the president of Iran. Other European nations followed the German example by exerting diplomatic pressure in the form of withdrawing their ambassadors. Another Iranian attempt to kidnap one of its citizens and blame the disappearance on Germany was foiled when German authorities refuted the Iranian government's claim that an Iranian dissident writer had boarded a German plane in Iran but did not disembark from it in Germany. The German government's prosecution of both cases as well as its withdrawal of its ambassador and its insistence that its European allies take the same initial diplomatic step proved to be effective. In the presenter's judgment, Helsinki type sanctions work when they are implemented by everyone concerned, including the Europeans, the Chinese, and the Russians.

A presenter commented that although Iranians living abroad are not in a position to assume leadership roles in the emerging democracy movement, through a variety of undertakings they can help to identify and train emerging Iranian leaders. He agreed with a participant that it should be possible for a number of American degrees, prized by Iranian students, to be obtained through the Internet. In fact, he related, he had helped to formulate such a program and worked on its development until he accepted his current position. A presenter added that three of President Ahmadinejad's cabinet ministers earned American degrees online.

In answer to a question about the brain drain, a presenter replied that it is a serious problem. After graduation many bright Iranians stay in Europe and the United States. Part of the reason, he said, is economic. Young doctors, for instance, must hold several jobs at once in Iran in order to provide for their basic needs and the needs of their families. Some work as cab drivers at night while they are on call at the hospital. The best leave and never come back. He stated, in response to another question, that the kinds of aid that political parties and trade union groups gave to the Portuguese Social Democrats in their

struggle to achieve a peaceful transition to democracy after the death of President Salazar could be used to advantage by the emerging democracy movement in Iran. That is why the Ministry of Intelligence is doing everything in its power to propagate the false notion that the vaunted velvet revolution that first developed in Eastern Europe is a device conceived by the U.S. government to subvert other governments and establish a regime in its own image. Accordingly, or so goes the official argument in Iran, it cannot work in Iran. A presenter added that in a UN report published last year, the brain drain in Iran was rated the highest in the world. As Iranian doctors leave for Canada, Iran imports doctors from the Philippines.

Is there really an underground in Iran, a participant asked? If so, how cohesive is it? There are two ways the reply—both a political and a cultural underground. The latter, he stated, features, among other attractions, music that its performers rap out in Farsi. The political underground is of great concern to the Iranian authorities. Its members have paid heavily for their opposition to the regime and for their insistence that human rights are universal and ought to be exercised in public.

A participant discussed the National Committee's track record in initiating track I-½ and track II diplomacy and asked a presenter whether either one of those diplomatic undertakings might work in the case of Iran. The presenter replied that the regime does not allow genuine nongovernment organizations (NGOs); nor does it allow foreign NGOs to establish themselves in Iran. Any group said by the government to be an Iranian NGO is actually a government front organization staffed by government operatives. One country—the Netherlands—has managed to advance the cause of the emerging Iranian democracy movement by limiting the scope of its projects, creating an Internet based radio station and an online magazine, and giving Freedom House in Washington money to promote democracy in Iran.

Another presenter voiced his support for track II diplomacy, stating that despite the infiltration of informers, called antennas, into meetings of democracy groups, such gatherings could achieve critical mass and perhaps impel the government to recognize the validity of the fledgling movement.

A participant, identifying the principals of track I-½ diplomacy as top government officials from such states as China, Taiwan, and North Korea, as well as their counterparts in the National Security Council and the State Department, and those involved in track II diplomacy

as scholars from think tanks and government officials, asked a presenter whether it might be effective to use track I-½ diplomacy to deal with the Iranian regime. He replied: Only in short-term situations—in meetings designed to avert an immediate crisis. Another presenter stated that meetings have taken place countless times between Iran and the United States since the Islamic Republic of Iran was established. The agendas have been relatively specific and the results have been successful. In contrast, discussions about who is to set the agenda for the Middle East have not taken place between the two sides because they would involve an assessment of who possesses more power. In his judgment, Iran's legitimacy, like Syria's, comes from its profession of anti-Americanism. Once it abandons that guise, the Islamic regime will fall.

The participant who posed the question about track I½ and track II diplomacy said that he thinks it would not be effective now because of all the infighting that is said to be taking place among the leaders of Iran. He asked about its nature and incidence. A presenter, in response, returned to a point he had made earlier: As long as the leaders, who disagree about everything except revolutionary ideology, are determined to preserve the revolution at the expense of creating a sovereign state, they will reject long-term negotiations with other states, especially with the United States.

The same participant raised a question about Iranian-Syrian relations and the possibility of separating Syria from Iran over the issue of Israel. A participant replied by comparing the forces that constitute the divided Syrian opposition with the weak regime in Damascus. Gathered at meeting places in Brussels and London, the Syrian opposition has not evoked a welcome from U.S. observers who are reluctant to support the Muslim Brotherhood—the nucleus of the opposition—and offend the mullahs, the Saudis, and the Egyptians who oppose the paramilitary force. The situation may be changing, however. As the Syrian regime grows weaker, the United States may decide to support those who are moving to topple it. When asked to comment, a presenter gave his assessment that Syria cannot be separated from Iran. In his judgment, all the sanctions that have been imposed on Syria are not working. Further, the opposition will be directed by the Muslim Brotherhood in combination with the Baathists. A civil war could ensue that would spill over into Lebanon. Chaos would reign in the region. Another presenter added his judgment. He does not think that civil war will erupt in Syria. Instead, he thinks that Syria, aided by Iran and Russia, will return to Lebanon within the next three years. Accordingly, he believes that the need for regime

change in Syria is urgent.

A participant asked the presenters to elaborate on a term used in the discussion: “a permanent U.S. presence in the Middle East.” Do they think that such a presence would be welcomed and could it be sustained? If so, where would it be positioned? It was the judgment of all of the presenters that it could be sustained wherever it was welcomed. A presenter related that a number of Arab states, namely Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan, maintain an association with NATO that could grow to full membership status. Further, he remarked that Egypt and Turkey, which, like Iran, have always played a role in shaping the balance of power in the Muslim world, may reassert themselves in the region through the NATO architecture. Meanwhile, Turkey must resolve its status in Europe, and Egypt must deal with its acute domestic problems.

In response to a question about Lebanon, a presenter said that the situation there was very dynamic. Hezbollah receives considerable sums of money from Iran. In effect it can be said that Hezbollah is a client of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is impossible to predict whether Hezbollah would be willing to give up its revolutionary role in the region to become a dominant domestic player in Lebanon and difficult to see how it can be uprooted from Lebanon in the absence of civil war. A presenter asserted that he thinks Hezbollah lost the war in Lebanon despite its claims of victory, which were echoed in the Western media. He also asserted that what really matters in Lebanon is U.S. policy toward the state. The United States, he remarked, has the power. In subcontracting it to France, the Saudis, and the Egyptians in varying degrees of decision-making authority, America is making a big mistake. If a war erupts in Lebanon, it will be between Iran and the United States. After losing the war against Israel conducted by its proxy, Hezbollah, Iran is not likely to make that mistake again.

The hosts thanked the presenters and the other participants and assured them that the day’s discussions would be instrumental in helping the National Committee on American Foreign Policy formulate its policy recommendations on “Iran: The Nuclear Threat and Beyond.”



# THE HOSTS, THE PRESENTERS, AND OTHER PARTICIPANTS

## *The Hosts*

Mr. William J. Flynn

*Chairman*

*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Dr. George D. Schwab

*President*

*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

## *The Presenters*

Dr. Ramin Ahmadi

*Cofounder*

*Iran Human Rights Documentation Center*

Dr. Bernard Haykel

*Professor, Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*

*New York University*

Dr. Fariborz Mokhtari

*Professor, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies*

*National Defense University*

Mr. Amir Taheri

*Author and commentator for CNN*

## *Other Participants*

Dr. Giuseppe Ammendola

*Adviser*

*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Mr. Robert L. Barbanell

*Trustee*

*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Ms. Eleana Benador

*Benador Associates, Inc.*

Mr. Albert Bildner

*Bildner Associates*

The Honorable Donald Blinken

*Trustee*

*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Mr. John V. Connorton, Esq.  
*Trustee*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Dr. Susan Aurelia Gitelson  
*Trustee*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Professor George E. Gruen  
*Senior Fellow and Adviser*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Ms. Cyrielle Jean-Sicard  
*Assistant to the President*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Ms. Madeline Konigsberg  
*Trustee*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Ms. Edwina McMahon  
*Senior Fellow*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Mr. Donald S. Rice, Esq.  
*Senior Vice President*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Ms. Sheila Robbins  
*Member*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Mr. Daniel Rose  
*Member*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Ms. Nina Rosenwald  
*American Securities Holding Corporation*

Mr. William M. Rudolf  
*Executive Vice President*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Mr. Clarence Schwab  
*Member*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*

Mr. Walter P. Stern  
*Member*  
*National Committee on American Foreign Policy*



## NCAFP POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ The National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) believes that it is absolutely essential to acquire accurate and comprehensive information about a country that appears to be on the verge of obtaining the ability to produce nuclear weapons. To that end, the NCAFP recommends that the U.S. government increase its intelligence-gathering personnel, facilities, and operations in Iran.
- ❖ The NCAFP recommends that the United States use the tracking methods it is said to have developed since 9/11 to prevent the transfer of money and other resources to Hezbollah (a client of Iran), which it uses against Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel. Similarly, the administration should redouble its efforts to make Iraq's borders with Iran and Syria less porous.
- ❖ The NCAFP recommends that the administration consult with a range of experts to help it make informed decisions concerning whether to include countries other than Iran and Syria in deliberations designed to stabilize Iraq. To be addressed, for example, are the following questions: Should Turkey, an ostensible ally of Israel, a long-term member of NATO, and a candidate in waiting for admission to the European Union, be included, or would that decision be likely to alienate the Kurds whose support is crucial to promoting stability in Iraq? What workable tradeoffs can be devised?
- ❖ The NCAFP believes that inviting only a self-confident Iran and a very weak Syria to discussions designed to determine the future of Iraq would heighten Iran's belief that its power status has given it the right to produce nuclear weapons and to become the leader of an incipient Islamic Empire. Such a development would appeal to Iran as a revolutionary regime, not to Iran as a sovereign state. We recommend that the United States deal with Iran institutionally as a sovereign state and as one of several balancers in one or more blocs that should be formed on the basis of deterrence in a region fraught with conflict.
- ❖ The NCAFP recommends that the administration enter into serious and strategic discussions with its allies designed to determine whether devising some level of association with NATO similar to that which exists for several Muslim states in

North Africa would benefit and curtail the revolutionary aspirations of other states in the Middle East.

- ❖ The NCAFP urges the U.S. government to support Freedom House in its work with the emergent Iranian democracy movement. We also recommend that the administration provide assistance to the Dutch and Belgian governments and other groups that are working successfully with dissident groups in Iran.
- ❖ The NCAFP appeals to U.S. universities to grant American degrees directly to Iranian students who have completed the required courses of study online or indirectly through other universities that have enrolled them in authorized U.S. degree-granting programs. Several caveats should inform the process, however. U.S. course offerings should not concentrate on U.S. technology, which the Iranian regime seeks to acquire and master. Instead, they should focus on leadership and organization, two skills that young people in Iran are said to lack. Moreover, the teaching of such skills should be set in a democratic context that emphasizes openness and free exchanges of ideas and other forms of participation, cooperation, and compromise.
- ❖ The NCAFP appeals to American trade unions to end their silence about conditions in Iran, support the fledgling trade union movement there, and engage the International Labor Organization in furthering the cause of Iranian workers.
- ❖ Echoing the words of Winston Churchill, the NCAFP affirms its belief that in this critical situation, “Jaw, jaw, jaw is better than war, war, war.”



## APPENDIX

### *Conclusions to Policy Statement on United States–Iranian Relations: Today and Tomorrow (July 1997, Revised April 2001)*

1. U.S. concerns about the current conduct of the Islamic Republic of Iran fall into four categories: state sponsorship of and assistance to international terrorism; encouragement of dissidence in and between Muslim governments friendly to the United States in particular and to the West in general; opposition to and disruption of the Middle East peace process; covert plans to develop nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.
2. The policies of the United States and its allies have not produced any noticeable change in the international conduct of the leaders of the Islamic Republic. U.S. economic sanctions, although not supported by the European Union, have created domestic hardships for the present Iranian regime, including rising unemployment, skyrocketing inflation, and the loss in value of the rial versus the dollar.
3. According to many observers, the last election in Iran indicates that a majority of the population wants change: a loosening of the rigid religious restrictions imposed by the Islamic Revolution, the modernization of social codes, especially those pertaining to women and youth, and in general a more open society. Intelligence and other information at our disposal suggest that a majority of the population of Iran is not only favorably disposed to many things Western and American but would also welcome improvements in relations between Iran and the United States. It is also clear that the present leaders of the Islamic Republic, although still castigating the United States, are looking for ways to improve economic relations.
4. Relations between the United States and Iran must be considered in terms of both the short- and long-term goals of American foreign policy, first, with respect to the Persian Gulf countries and, second, with respect to global concerns. In this regard Iran has been a cultural, a political, and a national entity for three thousand years. Moreover, its geostrategic location means that it cannot be ignored in any definitive arrangements concerning the security and economic development of the states bordering the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Therefore, Iran should not be indiscriminately linked with Iraq in a policy of “double containment.”



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**NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON  
AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY, INC.**

320 Park Avenue

New York, N.Y. 10022

Telephone: (212) 224 1120 • Fax: (212) 224 2524

E-Mail: [contact@ncafp.org](mailto:contact@ncafp.org) • Web site: <http://www.ncafp.org>