

No. 1, March 2004

AIC INSIGHT

AIC Insight Predictions

Who will become Iran's next President?

AIC Insight prediction:

Key candidates for Presidential elections: At this point, the Presidency is up for grabs, but the following names are often bandied about: Ahmad Tavakoli, Ali Larijani, and Hassan Rouhani.

Who's Who in the next Iranian Parliament?

AIC Insight predictions:

Speaker: Hadad Adel or Ahmad Tavakoli

Deputies: Ahmad Tavakoli, Hadad Adel or Mohammad Reza Bahonar

Key Members of the Foreign Relations

Committee: Alladin Brojerdi (formerly a Deputy Foreign Minister), Houssain Shaikh-oleslami (formerly a Deputy Foreign Minister and the Ambassador to Syria), Manouchehr Mottaki (formerly a Deputy Foreign Minister and the Ambassador to Turkey and Japan), Mohammad Houssain Akhtari (clergyman, formerly the Ambassador to Syria), and Mahmood Mahamadi (formerly the Spokeman of the Foreign Ministry)

Which Parliament will ratify the Additional Protocol to the Nonproliferation Treaty, the current or the forthcoming?

AIC Insight prediction: The forthcoming Majlis.

Will the forthcoming Parliament be prepared to meet with American Congressional Representatives?

AIC Insight prediction: Possible to yes.

What will the new Parliament focus on?

AIC Insight prediction:

- 1) The economy, and
- 2) Social justice and welfare programs to some extent, the relaxation of some social restrictions.

Its approach to political liberalism and press freedom will depend on two factors: (a) How united the reform movement remains and whether it expands and, (b) The extent of foreign pressure for human rights and democracy — that is, if they are pressured, they will make changes.

IISA and the Japanese?

Japanese state oil firm Inpex finalized dis-

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Editorial

Why AIC Insight?

Twenty-five years after the Iranian Revolution, US-Iran relations remain abnormal. Not only have the governments on both sides refused to establish diplomatic relations, something that often happens with states at war, but the two sides have continued to demonize each other by name-calling and to perpetuate mutual misunderstanding by refusing to hear each other.

What is even more ironic is that while there is not a single concern that the governments could not negotiate, and this fact is widely acknowledged by both sides, Washington and Tehran have refused to engage in an agenda-driven dialogue. It has often been the case that whenever one side has been willing to engage, the other side has not been ready. Thus, missed opportunities have come to characterize the relations.

US-Iran relations suffer from a host of objective and fictitious concerns. The most challenging

task on both sides is, therefore, to separate fact from fiction. Yet in the absence of accurate information and direct communication, such a distinction has not been possible. I am often shocked by how little the two sides understand each other, or know of each other's policy positions on issues of mutual concern.

US-Iran relations also suffer from an ideologically charged environment that tends to forestall debate on a more appropriate US approach to Iran. To change Iran into a friendly and democratic country, what means should the United States use as its primary tool: sanctions, war, or trade with diplomacy? The American experience in the last 25 years with hostile and friendly dictatorships should help answer this question.

AIC Insight addresses these problems of information void and policy vagueness. The publica-
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Interview with Ambassador Javad Zarif



AIC Insight this interview.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: My pleasure.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: The *AIC Insight* is a new publication of the American Iranian Council, and it is published as part of a 2004 project on US-Iran relations. We hope to use this publication to fill the informational gap that exists between the two countries, as well as to make the policy positions on both sides more transparent than they are. We believe that these are two significant problems for a better

understanding between the two governments.

This is the first interview for *AIC Insight*, and you are the first to speak, and thank you for that. We will focus on US-Iran relations. Let me ask you the first question. Please tell us what you think is the state of US-Iran relations. Where do we stand now? And where do you think we are going?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Let me begin by saying that I very much appreciate the objective of your publication. I share with you the concern over the lack of objective information about the policies, behaviors, and expectations of the two sides. There is a great deal of misperception, and I believe if an objective attempt is made to bridge this very serious gap of knowledge and understanding, it would be serving the interests of both countries.

The state of affairs between Iran and the US right now is a state of compounded misperceptions on both sides. We have had, both Iran and the US, a number of experiments with one another, and none of these experiments turned out to be positive, because they were not capable of addressing the root causes of the

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Why AIC Insight?

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tion will focus on interviews with key policy makers in an attempt to establish indirect dialogue among them and thus to make policy positions on both sides more transparent. The *Insight* will also provide its readers with accurate and relevant information and analysis, and help engage the civil societies on both sides.

The first issue of the *Insight* carries Part One of an interview with Dr. Javad Zarif, Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations. In a candid and forthright discussion, I have engaged the Ambassador in a series of questions and comments, often to the point of a debate, in an attempt to make Iran's policy positions on key American concerns as transparent as possible. The next issue of the *Insight* will publish the second part of the interview.

While not perfect, the interview provides new information, and further clarifies Iran's position on key American concerns, such as weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and the Middle East peace. But how satisfactory are these new information and clarifications to the American officials? To find the answer to this question, we are hoping to hold an interview with an American policy maker for a subsequent issue of the *Insight*.

The first few issues of the *Insight* are, therefore, focused on the American concerns. We will then turn to the Iranian concerns. Through interviews with American policy makers we will try to make US policy positions vis-a-vis these concerns more informative and transparent. Subsequent interviews with Iranian official should indicate how satisfactory our attempt has been. The readers will be the final judges.

In addition to new information and more transparent policy positions, the *Insights* reciprocal interview exercise also hopes to identify areas where the two sides have common interests and where their interests and views are divergent. These findings should in turn help indicate new avenues for confidence building and conflict resolution, and thus assist in drawing a roadmap for constructive engagement.

AIC Insight is published as part of an AIC 2004 project that focuses on four key areas: revisiting issues of dispute between the United States and Iran, Iranian regime stability and implications for regional security, conditions for transition to democracy in Iran, and a road map for better US-Iran relations. The project is partially supported by grants from the **Rockefeller Brothers Fund** and the **Open Society Institute**.

Hooshang Amirahmadi

AIC Insight Predictions

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cussions on 19 February with NIOC agreeing to invest \$2 billion in the 26-billion-barrel Azadegan oil field in southwestern Iran. Inpex will hold a 75 percent stake in the operation. The first oil is expected in 2007, with a full flow rate of 260,000 barrels per day projected for 2012. Surprisingly, the American government made no loud objection. Libya's recent moves mean that ILSA will soon become ISA. Does that mean that the Administration also considers ILSA dead? Can ISA survive thereafter?

AIC Insight prediction: We are still thinking it over!

AIC Insight Highlights

Iranian New Year, 1383, Known as Norooz

Norooz began March 21, 2004, which is the first day of Spring. AIC was gratified to note that President Bush, Senator Kerry and other American officials have sent greetings to Iranian-Americans on the occasion. AIC also extends Norooz greetings to all Iranian-Americans and Iranians throughout the world.

March 8, 2004: The International Women's Day

AIC would like to take this opportunity to extend its gratitude to all the women that have made a difference in our lives. It is fitting to recall that this year has been an incredible year for Iranian women: Shirin Ebadi won the Nobel Prize, Shohreh Aghdashloo was nominated for a Best Supporting Actress Oscar, Azar Nafisi's book, "Reading Lolita in Tehran," was a national best-seller, and Nazanin Afshin-Jam won the Miss World Canada pageant.

Two Interesting Remarks from Senior State Department Officials:

Senior DOS officials made two interesting remarks this March. In his introductory remarks to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States on March 23, Secretary Colin Powell made numerous mentions of Iran's cooperation with the United States in its approach to Afghanistan, noting their work through the Bonn Group and "a group under UN chairmanship in Geneva where we and Iran could discuss Afghanistan directly."

In an interview conducted by Al-Jazeera on March 18, Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage said: "I was the one who testified on Capitol Hill that regime change was not our policy. And I made it crystal clear that we are perfectly willing to talk to the Iranians on issues of mutual concern, and we do. We talk about the question of Afghanistan. We talk about the question of terrorism, and particularly al-Qaeda, who are under some sort of surveillance, if not house ar-

rest in Iran. So we have plenty of time for dialogue and we're not opposed, but we wanted to be on issues that we both can agree are important to us."

Secretary Powell, in the speech mentioned above, outlined the method by which the U.S. would address non-proliferation with regard to Iran. He intends to close the loophole in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, by which he is reported to mean to change Article VI so that "the 40 nations of the Nuclear Suppliers Group are prohibited to sell enrichment and reprocessing equipment and technologies to any state that does not already possess full-scale, functioning enrichment and reprocessing plants"; create a special committee at the International Atomic Energy Agency to focus on safeguards and verification; and prohibit countries under investigation for violating nuclear nonproliferation treaties from serving on the IAEA Board of Governors. (The text of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty can be found on our website at:

<http://www.american-iranian.org/beta/driver.php?SectionID=2&PageID=7&SubID=0.>)

AIC Insight's Gibe & Gab

In a State Department press briefing by Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli on March 17, 2004, he addressed the question of talks between the US and Iran in the following way:

"On the broader subject of talks with Iran, you know, we've always made clear that we are willing to engage with Iran on specific issues of mutual concern — in an appropriate manner, and if and when the President determines that it is in our interest to do so."

AIC Insight commentary: An invitation no man could decline.

On February 25, 2004, Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner was asked how the United States was going to approach Iran in order to get them to respond to human rights concerns:

"We have been — this is a case a bit like Cuba, where we have been talking to and working with other countries, many of whom have closer relations with Iran than we do, but asking them to pursue these issues with the Iranians."

AIC Insight commentary: If at first you don't succeed, try, try again (but maybe try another way).

"President Bush has said that there are two types of countries in the world, those that are with us and those against us. We agree with one small modification: there are two types of countries in the world, those whose governments are with us, and their people are against us; and those whose governments are against us, but whose people are with us."

From a speech by Dr. Hooshang Amirahmadi

The Iranian Parliamentary Elections and US-Iran Relations

The Iranian *Revanchists*, known as “conservatives,” have won the parliamentary elections. Some called it a *coup* as candidates were screened and votes rigged. President Bush expressed disappointment and sent a supportive message to the Iranian people. Ironically, those who express the deepest regret at the results are the same people who boycotted the elections and made every effort to discredit the reformers. It is like shooting a victim and then crying for the dead.

While the elections process was deplorable, the results should not be hastily dismissed. Fifty percent of the 46 million eligible to vote participated, the lowest participation rate of any of the six previous parliamentary elections. Of those who participated, about 15 percent voted blank. Large cities like Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad and Tabriz showed a participation rate of about 30 percent. Most votes were collected from smaller towns and villages, where local, ethnic, and tribal differences are often translated into election contests.

A so-called “rationalist” faction among the *Revanchists*, referring to themselves as the *Abadgaran* or “Developmentalists” won the most seats. Many of them are religious laymen and technocrats who like to be viewed as largely non-political, though they are avowedly partisans. They are the Leader Ali Khamanei’s alternative to the original, and now largely undermined, “pragmatist” Servants of Reconstruction (*Kargozaran-e Sazandegi*), who formed around former President Hashemi Rafsanjani and joined the reformists against the *Revanchists*.

The Developmentalists, who already control many of the local councils and the Tehran municipality, are better defined as a transitional social group within the *Revanchist* movement. They are a hybrid nativist group with roots in the bazaar, neither modern nor traditional. While all *Revanchists* wish to recapture their lost prominence – hence the term — the Developmentalists are less concerned about the revival of a mythical past, and their ultimate loyalty to theocratic fundamentalism is suspect. They hold an unsophisticated view of Iran’s international and domestic challenges, despite the fact that some among them hold doctorate degrees and a few have studied abroad.

The winners now have to deal with both opponents and supporters in a generally dissatisfied large

population besieged with declining real income, administrative corruption, and social ills like crime and addiction. The poor want their basic needs addressed, the educated groups require freedoms, the wealthy demand a secure business climate, the young people want jobs, and women demand equal rights. They must also deal with the expatriates crying for lost national pride, the separatist calls by certain ethnic groups, and strike a balance between the modern and traditional forces.

Meanwhile, they must respond to the multiple concerns of the United States and Europe. These include weapons of mass destruction, currently focused on the nuclear technology question; terrorism in all its forms and against Israel in particular; and peace in the Middle East. Human rights have



become an increasingly bigger concern, but for the moment it has taken a back seat to the nuclear and terrorism issues. The good news is that these matters are all negotiable, but the real problem has always been to find the right roadmap.

The Developmentalists are expected to make mistakes similar to the reformists and pragmatists. The middle class reformists claimed that political development was the key to Iran’s ills. As a consequence, they neglected to address economic development and social justice. Before them, the pragmatists had determined that the solution to all of Iran’s ills was an economic one, a mistake that essentially forced them out of power. The Developmentalists seem to think more like the pragmatists, with a small dose of social justice. In reality, economic growth, political development, and social justice are mutually inclusive in Iran.

As such, a coalition of the Iranian entrepreneurs, the middle class and the working people, along with other civil and political groups, and the international democratic community, can address

these problems, but such a coalition remains a distant dream. Even within the *Revanchists* in power, who include the clergy, the strategically positioned state bureaucrats, and the big merchants, a united front cannot emerge. In post-elections Iran, a major fault line will develop between the transitional and fundamentalist factions.

The anticipated friction within the *Revanchists* could ultimately tilt the balance in favor of the transitional group if the pro-democracy front and the United States were to map out an approach to the regime in Tehran that would co-opt rather than isolate the Developmentalists. The name of the game is “engagement,” but one that would, over time, weaken the political power of the fundamentalists while empowering the rest, including the civil society. How might this be achieved?

The reformists, largely the middle class intelligentsia, must now be content with loss of power, join forces with other democratic groups, and begin the hard work of organizing the disenfranchised civil and political societies. Their movement must now become a socio-political one. They must also acknowledge the needs of the Iranian entrepreneurs, in an attempt to build a broader coalition and a more powerful economic base. The pro-democracy groups must also loudly support the normalization of relations with the United States.

US-Iran hostility remains the key challenge of democracy and development in Iran. Anti-American nations have never opted for democratization. More than 75 percent of Iranians view the normalization of relations with the United States as the best thing for their national interest. They know well that the lack of relations has cost them huge material and political losses as well as a decline in international prestige. The one key demand they have is that any negotiation between the two governments is fully transparent.

The American national interest would also be well served by the normalization of relations with Iran. In the past 25 years, when the two countries have had no diplomatic relations, every American administration has acknowledged the strategic, economic, and cultural significance of Iran. Iran holds the fourth largest oil and the second largest natural gas reserves of the world, and with a population of over 70 million, and with an investment deficit of over \$100 billion, it is the largest market in its region.

The good news is that the environment of US-

Iran relations is slowly but surely changing in a positive direction. Iran helped the United States fight al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Saddam Hussein. Tehran has also generously contributed to the Iraqi and Afghan reconstruction funds. Iran has signed the Additional Protocol of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and is cooperating with it, though many problems remain to be resolved. Iran now officially accepts a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The Bush Administration has on more than one occasion acknowledged the positive contributions of Iran to American wars in the region and Iran's cooperation with the IAEA. President Bush welcomed Iran's signing of the IAEA's Additional Protocol as "a very positive development," and responded generously to the Bam disaster and offered to send a high-level delegation to the country. Indeed, rhetoric aside, the Bush Administration has taken no significant practical steps to further isolate Iran.

Twice in recent months the United States had the opportunity to isolate Iran, but on both occasions at the IAEA it sided with the European states — dropped threatening languages from the resolutions, toned down its criticisms of Iran's nuclear activities, and even agreed to praise Iran for cooperation. Another highly significant change on the US-Iran front was the unexpected approval of the Iraq-Iran pipeline in early March by the Coalition Provisional Authority.

The elections now provide a new window of opportunity for the United States to engage Iran. The transitional *Revanchists* are expected to consolidate power by taking the presidency when President Khatami's term ends next August. They are expected to insist on relaxing social restrictions, pouring billions of dollars from oil revenues, and billions more they are expected to borrow, into the economy, and moderating foreign policy. They will also be prepared to hold dialogue with the United States, if approached properly.

Given the mistrust on both sides, any engagement must begin with building trust between the two governments. A key starting point is a coordinated simultaneous announcement that, under certain conditions, Tehran and Washington will be prepared to engage with the intention of normalizing relations. To further their mutual trust, the two sides might also underscore the need for, and the key role of, regional cooperation.

Misperception has been at the root of mutual demonization and deception. To build trust, both sides must broaden their perspectives of each other's concerns, deeds, intentions and capabilities. Tehran must stop seeing the United States as a sworn enemy of Iran. True, Americans helped the British in the 1953 *coup*, but Americans have also contributed to Iranian development. The list of Americans who have

served Iran is long; it includes Morgan Shuster, who helped organize a modern administration in Tehran, and Howard C. Baskerville, who lost his life for the Iranian Constitutional Revolution.

American officials have stressed Iran's strategic significance, but this is often done to underscore its potential for aggression. The presumption that "a weaker Iran is a better Iran" was the basis of the "dual containment" policy — which often ignored Iran's legitimate defense needs. Yet, in the last 150 years, a strong Iran has never initiated any hostility toward its neighbors. A strong Iran, in partnership with the United States, can indeed become a pivot of regional stability.

The common interests of the United States and Iran far outweigh their differences. This has not often been acknowledged or used to develop a common purpose and action plan to fight terrorism and to moderate Islamic fundamentalism, eliminate weapons of mass destruction, advance the Middle East peace, institutionalize a regional security system, stabilize Iraq and Afghanistan, ensure the safe flow of oil from the region, and improve governance and human rights in the region. At stake also is the stability and sustainable independence of the states in the Central Asia and Caucasus.

The situation in Iraq and the proximity of American and Iranian forces in the region, particularly in Islamic Afghanistan and Iraq, provides additional strategic imperative for the two governments to work cooperatively. A stable Iraq and Afghanistan are in the best interest of both countries, and Iran can help to positively influence the situation in both countries as it has influence among key Shi'ite and other leaders there. The United States must give Iran the opportunity to do so and then reward it for its cooperation.

US-Iran engagement will weaken the fundamentalists while strengthening the position of the transitional groups and pro-democracy and pragmatic forces within and without the government. As the elections also indicate, most Iranians do not want violent regime change, though many yearn for democratic transformation. Diplomacy and trade build respect for human rights and freedoms, rightly asserted Secretary of State Colin Powell in a recent speech on US foreign policy.

Those who think engagement with the Iranian *Revanchists* is not good for democracy there or for the United States' national interest must also consider this: in the last 25 years, some 30 dictatorships have made transition to democracies. They all had diplomatic and trade relations with the United States. Examples include states in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia. In contrast, dictatorships with no diplomatic ties with the United States, and under its economic sanctions, remain in place. Examples include Cuba and North Korea.

Under no condition should US-Iran engagement overlook Iran's dismal human rights records or weaken its pro-democracy movement. US pressure on Tehran to observe its constitutional and international obligations must increase as the two sides open a dialogue and cooperate on specific concerns. There is no alternative to Iran becoming a democratic nation, where religion and the state operate in separate fields. Allowing humanitarian fund transfers and American NGOs to operate freely in Iran, and relaxing visa restrictions on their Iranian counterparts, will be most helpful.

As the two governments build confidence, they must also be prepared for a bargain that puts an end to their dispute and normalizes relations. Iran ought to further help the United States to eradicate terrorism in all its forms and against all nations, including Israel, and to end violence in Iraq and the Palestinian-Israeli territories. Iran must hand over the known Al-Qaeda terrorists to their home countries, stop its support for the Jihad and Hamas, help transform the Lebanese Hezbollah into a more conventional political force, and begin to view Israel as a normal state even if it is not prepared to normalize relations.

Iran needs to remove the nuclear concern from US-Iran relations. Tehran will likely shy away from a Libyan approach to its nuclear program, but the "disclose when you are caught lying" approach will not work either. It will further damage Iran's credibility and call into question its commitment to remain within the bounds of peaceful use of nuclear technology. Iran should abandon enrichment in return for guaranteed fuel supplies, and the United States should take Tehran's offer to participate in Iran's nuclear technology development for peaceful purposes.

The United States needs to reciprocate such grand bargains if offered, and what should be offered and when is a matter of policy. Washington can remove Iran from the list of terrorist states, end sanctions in stages, drop opposition to Iran's membership in the World Trade Organization and Asia Development Bank, free Iran's remaining frozen assets, and address Iran's security concerns by defining and institutionalizing a regional security system that incorporates Iran as an influential member.

Iran should not become another Iraq or Cuba for the United States. The national interests of neither side would be served by such eventualities. The American policy toward the former Soviet bloc and South Africa, for example, provides a more effective alternative. The next months before the presidential elections in the United States are critical. The conditions are better, a strategic imperative exists, and both sides need each other as never before. An "October surprise" is by no means unthinkable.

Hooshang Amirahmadi

Interview with Ambassador Javad Zarif

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difficulties between Iran and the US, which emanated from these misperceptions. And it has led to the state of affairs that we are in now.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: The state that we are in. What is it?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: It is a state of very serious mistrust. None of the steps that are taken by one side are seen exactly in the same light and with the proper understanding of the objectives behind those steps. And my analysis is that we have been unable to move forward because we have not articulated exactly what we expect from the other side and what it is that would satisfy our expectations, and what are the measures that we are ready to take ourselves. So we have been basically shooting in the dark.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: We will come back to this issue of both sides' inability to articulate their demands, perhaps. But where are we going from here? Where will we be in six months? In a year?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Well, it all depends on how the United States is prepared to address our concerns. We feel that there is a very serious misperception among certain players in Washington, about the longevity of the Iranian government. They believe, or they hope, a new situation is in the offing, and the US should wait to deal with that new situation. That has prevented the United States from adopting a more realistic approach. Of course, there are indications of greater realism on the part of the US.

But to move beyond this situation, I think, we should start from one premise; that is, we should each understand that the policies adopted by the other side are motivated by national interests. We need to first of all appreciate that no country will be prepared to allow its national interests to be undermined. Iran should understand that for the United States, there are a number of issues that would pertain to its national interests, and the United States should also respect Iran's national interests and national security consideration. I see some signs of that emerging, and that is why I am less pessimistic today about the possibilities for movement forward.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: You talked about demand articulation. You said that one problem you see in the relations between Iran and the US is that they have failed to articulate their demands. Well,

the Americans have. Basically they say that they have four problems: The problem with the weapons of mass destruction, particularly the nuclear issue; the terrorism issue; the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians; and finally the human rights and democracy issues. Do you think that these are bogus demands? Are they real? Do you think that the Americans have a right to be concerned with any of those issues?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I think they're not bogus demands but they're not real either. These are public demands that have achieved more of a cliché status rather than an operational status. We have the same types of demands, and we have articulated those, but those are also demands that can fall within the realm of general policy statements rather than practical demands for steps that the other side can take in order to move forward. Now, on those four issues that you mentioned, it is important to have criteria and to understand what are the yardsticks that either side would use to measure movement in these areas.

And the same is true of Iranian demands. Iran demands that the US stop its hostility toward Iran. Iran demands that the US recognize Iranian national interests. We demand that the US stop interfering in our internal affairs, or stop preventing Iran from normalizing its economy. These are our demands, but how do we want to operationalize these demands in terms of more clear expectations from the other side about what needs to be done? I think that is very much missing in the interactions between the two countries.

So if we agree that there is a very serious mutual mistrust between the two countries, and if we agree that in the atmosphere of serious mutual mistrust, even with the best of intentions, once your objective of a move is missed by the other side, then instead of removing the mistrust it can compound the mistrust. Thus, it is necessary for the two sides to articulate more clearly what they expect and what they are prepared to do.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Has the nature of the US concerns toward Iran changed at all over time? That is, do we have the same problem in terms of intensity, concerning the weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, the peace process, and human rights? Do you see a movement toward mitigation of the concerns?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: It's very difficult,

again, in the absence of clearly defined criteria, to understand exactly what the concerns are. Whether they are simply political, general concerns caused by the fact that a regime is not fully or even partially associated with the US government, or whether there is objective concern about such behaviour. Let me use the nuclear case, the weapons of mass destruction. It is unclear, from the statements which come from Washington, whether Washington would be content with Iran having nuclear power under any circumstances. The US is raising the argument today that Iran does not need nuclear energy, whereas in 1978, the State Department itself is on the record saying that Iran needs to diversify its sources of energy, including in the nuclear field. So it is clear that from an objective perspective, the US is making a political statement rather than a statement of concern about Iran's nuclear program. And that is why it is necessary for the US to clearly articulate what is it about Iran's access to nuclear technology that is so harmful, that it has tried so vehemently to prevent, which has in itself led to this vicious circle of concealment by Iran. Pressure, leading to concealment; because of US pressure, Iran had no other alternative but to conceal.

The fact that Iran has agreed, through the European initiative and not through US pressure, to sign the additional protocol and to accept more intrusive inspections by the IAEA, should remove some of the concerns on the US side. But whether it does or not would be an indication of whether the US concerns about Iran's nuclear program were rooted in the nuclear program or were rooted in the political relations between Iran and the US.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: If I were a US official talking to you, I would say the reason I changed my mind about Iran's nuclear energy issue between the 70s and now is because Iran's intention changed.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Okay, so say it. Say it very clearly, that you changed your intention. You see, what has led to mistrust is that the same government, the same State Department that was saying that Iran needs nuclear energy for energy purposes, is today saying that a country sitting on top of so much gas and oil doesn't need nuclear energy. It can be very honest and realistic and say, the government of the Shah was a friendly government, so it could have had access to nuclear technology. This government is not a friendly government, so it cannot have access. If it wants to maintain some credibility and trust internationally, and foster some confidence in the Iranian polity, then it has to articulate its positions with some objectivity and with some honesty.

So what you said is very correct. It's the intentions that hurt. It's not energy that is in question,

and this is what we want the US to come out and say. They should come out and say that Iranian intention for nuclear technology is suspicious, and that is why we need to address this intention. If you are concerned about our intention for nuclear technology, then we can find avenues of addressing the intention. But if you simply deny the fact that Iran needs nuclear energy, and in fact contradict your own view, then basically you are asking Iran to dismantle its nuclear program for you to be happy.

That is why I said there is a very serious difference between cliché statements of policy and articulation of real objectives. For example, if the real objective of the US is simply the dismantlement of the Iranian nuclear industry, then it won't get it. If the objective of the US is to make sure that Iran does not develop weapons of mass destruction, now or any time in the future, then Iran is prepared with the same vehemence to participate in a process to insure that it will never move in the weapons direction. It is our considered view that possession of weapons of mass destruction or even the perception that Iran possesses weapons of mass destruction or is seeking weapons of mass destruction undermines our security. So we are prepared to address that issue, so that there is no doubt that we are not possessing or pursuing weapons of mass destruction. But we are not prepared to address the other possible objectives, that is, to dismantle our nuclear program.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So what you are basically saying is that if the US were to work with you on the energy side, on the bomb side the situation is really final. That is, the decisions that the Iranian government has taken over the last few months are completely final, and reflect its strategic direction, and that there is absolutely no intention on the Iran side to go nuclear.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I can make that statement in the most unequivocal terms, that Iran does not want to develop a bomb. I speak for the entire Iranian government.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: The government, you mean the...

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I'm talking about the entire Iranian government, from the Leader, to the President, to the Parliament. Now, Iran is a diverse society, a society where freedom of expression is exercised in a manner that is less than complete, less than satisfactory, but nonetheless it exists. And that is why you see a wide variety of views being expressed on the nuclear issue by various Iranian individuals, intellectuals, and even public figures. But one issue is to discuss various options; the other issue is what is the government policy and government strategic thinking and particularly defense doctrine, and what I said is in line with defense doctrine. However, the problem of articulation on the part of the US is that it has not been able to articulate clearly which of the

two policies it wants to adopt: To deprive Iran of nuclear technology, or to prevent Iran from having access to nuclear weapons. If it's the former, Iran is not willing to participate in the promotion of that policy. If it's the latter, we have a national security interest in cooperating with that policy.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: All right, now, what is it that Iran is prepared to do to convince the US government that it should come to the Iran side on nuclear energy and work with it, so it can see close up.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: This would be entering into negotiations before the United States even takes a position of articulating its demands. It is necessary for each side, as I said, to get to the position of putting in very clear terms what it is that they expect. I think that in process of articulation, I hope, we will find that what divides us is much less than what can become areas of cooperation between Iran and the US. I think while we stick to the generalities of cliché statements, we will see two countries that are moving in opposite directions. Once we start articulating the exact conditions that would be conducive to each side's national security, even in these contested areas, then we are entering the possibility of saying more clearly where commonalities of interest can exist, even in these contested areas. I'm not talking about areas where we have already seen mutuality of interest, like Persian Gulf security, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Are Iran and Poland Similar?

The following is a letter sent on March 1 to *The Wall Street Journal* in response to the Op-Ed by Drs. Michael McFaul and Abbas Milani they published on February 23, 2004 entitled "Solidarity With Iran." *The Wall Street Journal* declined to publish the letter:

As someone who came to regard Dr. McFaul's political analysis as some of the most sophisticated and nuanced available when I was a "Russia watcher," I was surprised and befuddled by the suggested similarity between the former People's Republic of Poland and Iran in the piece written with Dr. Milani your newspaper published.

The similarities are cosmetic, if that.

First, despite its many shortcomings, Iran is not a totalitarian government. Totalitarian governments do not allow for the open existence of any opposition organizations. Drs. McFaul and Milani ironically made the same point: "Iranian society is today one of the most pluralist ... in the region."

Secondly, the monopoly of force in Iran is firmly in the hands of the Iranian government, not that of an occupying foreign army, as was the case with Poland and the USSR.

Thirdly, no matter how little the rule of law has made progress in Iran, its economy is girded by the Koran's sacred endorsement of private property. It is not a command economy.

Fourthly, there is no community analogous to the Christian churches, which played such an important role in the resistance to the regimes in Poland and throughout the Soviet bloc

Fifthly, and perhaps most importantly, the United States always maintained diplomatic and trading relations with Poland. The official American presence in the Soviet bloc helped the US Government get the right information in a timely fashion so as to make the right decisions about how best to help the nascent democracy movements throughout the Soviet bloc. (Indeed, the lack of information regarding Iran appears to be so dire

that certain members of Congress, *The New York Times*, and Richard Perle are all looking to a known terrorist group for Iran analysis and insights!)

As the Assistant Secretary of State, Lorne W. Craner, remarked in a press briefing on February 25, the approach the US government takes toward Iran is "a bit like Cuba." And the US approach to Cuba is not at all like the approach we took to the former Polish People's Republic.

Perhaps Drs. McFaul and Milani believe that the American policy of isolation has done much to advance the causes of democracy and human rights in Cuba over the last fifty years. I, for one, do not. On the contrary, I believe that the policy of isolation only serves to strengthen the hand of the *Revanchists* on both sides of the pond.

Should the US Government adopt the policy recommendations made by Drs. McFaul and Milani, we can reasonably expect at least another twenty-five years of autocratic rule in Iran, with all that connotes for the liberty of the long-suffering Iranian people.

*Tommy Corcoran, Executive Director
American Iranian Council*

DR. AMIRAHMADI: I recall the spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Minister at one point saying that the American technology firms are welcome to participate in Iran's nuclear industry. Does that offer still stand?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Yes. In 1978, the State Department's memo, in which it welcomed Iran's diversification, also welcomed the possibility for American nuclear industry to come to Iran. And Iran is prepared to welcome them today as well. And this is not just a cliché statement. The fact that the US is invited, and has been invited, to come and participate in Iran's nuclear industry, from our point of view, is an indication of our intention not to build a nuclear bomb. Otherwise, we wouldn't invite the US industry to come and do it for us. US participation would ensure exclusive peaceful use, and from the US point of view, it should offer the best guarantee. And I think it is the best confidence building measure that Iran can provide, whether it has been understood as such or not, and this is where I said we are shooting in the dark.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So, the conclusion I derive from your discussion, which is quite illuminating, is that the nuclear issue is ready for the negotiation table, and that, basically, everything is set to get resolved about this concern. In other words, if the two countries were to sit at a negotiation table and discuss this matter, there is very little that is left to create problems.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I can say that the US did lose a big opportunity prior to the November meeting of the IAEA. Based on the agreement that we had with the Europeans in October in Tehran, we went with a number of steps that if fully implemented will satisfy the Europeans and hopefully will satisfy the US. But the opportunities are still there for joint cooperation in these areas.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: What were such opportunities? And are you ready to discuss these bilaterally with the US?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Bilateral discussions with the United States require moving beyond the current state of simply throwing at each other the general demands which have become clichés, and moving into areas that you are prepared to deal with, into each of these issues of mutual concern – and Iran certainly has its own – in an operational, results-oriented fashion, and not in simply accusatory, prosecutorial fashion – which could be the case on both sides. We would, therefore, need to first address this very serious question of how you can start a dialogue that can be in fact conducive and successful.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So if there was to be a negotiation, then the nuclear issue could be on the table and it could be negotiated. And it seems to me that a lot of the issues that concern the US here can be easily addressed.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Yes.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Next, on terrorism. Again, I am going through the American list of demands and I will come to the Iranian demands at some point. On terrorism, how have things changed? The US has gone and fought Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and Iran stayed on its side in that fight, and the US went to Iraq to fight Saddam Hussein and his dictatorship there, and Iran stayed on its side again. But there are problems still, the Hamas, the Hezbollah, Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic Jihad. Particularly these days, the issue of the Al-Qaeda people in Iran.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Let's deal with Al-Qaeda and then we will deal with the Middle East in a separate fashion, because these are two separate, different issues.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: First, broadly, has anything changed here, on the terrorism issue?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Let me tell you. What Al-Qaeda represents is a very serious threat to Iranian national security. It was a threat against us before it became a threat against the United States. And that is why Iran considered Al-Qaeda as its major enemy. So the fight against Al-Qaeda, and against what everybody agrees to be international terrorism, is a good yardstick. Now what is important to understand is that Iran has taken more drastic steps against Al-Qaeda than any other country, and for that reason we face a very serious threat from Al-Qaeda. At the same time that the United States expects Iran to fight Al-Qaeda, it has failed, on the same terrorism front, to deal with MEK, an organization that the US itself considers a terrorist organization. Why? Because some in the US believe that at some point, MEK can prove useful for undermining Iran's security. And this equation makes it very difficult. It's not a matter of quid pro quo. Iran is not trying to strike a bargain. Iran simply wants to see the intentions. Whether the fight against terrorism is a fight to enhance everybody's national security, or whether it is simply an attempt to undermine Iran's security by various players like Al-Qaeda and MEK and the US itself.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: This is a very serious charge, Mr. Ambassador. Basically you are saying that the US views Al-Qaeda as a possible force that could be used against Iran's security?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: No. I'm saying that Al-

Qaeda is a force that is threatening Iran's security.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: But you are also saying that the US is also thinking in the direction of possibly using it for that purpose?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: No. I'm saying that the US expects Iran to deal even further with Al-Qaeda, while at the same time the US is not prepared to deal with Iran's national security and it is preserving for itself the option of using MEK against Iranian security. And this is not a conspiracy theory perspective. This is clearly stated by a good number of influential people within the current administration, that they need to maintain contact and maintain the viability of this organization for future use against Iran. And this is why Iran is concerned about the US approach to terrorism, and that is why, again, using the cliché statement of "fighting against terrorism" without operationalizing it in terms of national security considerations of all countries has become the problem in dealing with the issues between Iran and the US.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Al-Qaeda was not an issue in US-Iran relations until recently. How did it become an issue?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: It's a question which must be addressed to the United States.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: But they say, because Al-Qaeda got into Iranian territory and they are now being held and protected in Iran and so on. How did they get into Iran, by the way?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: How did they get into the US, by the way? Iran is a vast country. We control our borders, but some were able to somehow violate our borders and enter our territory, as they are able to violate the US borders and enter the US territory. The people who carried out the September 11 tragedy did not come from the sky; they were living in various US cities. Infiltration of terrorist elements into various territories is unfortunately a fact of life. The fact that Iran has captured those who have infiltrated its territory, expelled some of them to where they had come from, extradited some of them to their countries of origin, and continues to detain a number of them in Iranian jails, is an indication that we are serious about fighting this menace.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Do you have in Iran any major Al-Qaeda figures?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: We have in Iran a number of elements that are associated with Al-Qaeda. They are in Iranian jails.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Why not send them out?

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AMBASSADOR ZARIF: As I said, they have committed crimes against Iranian national security and they should be punished in Iran for the crimes that they have committed against our security. And at the same time, we cannot neglect the threat against our own security that comes from Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is a threat against us because we have engaged them with full force.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: How do you improve your security by keeping them in an Iranian prison?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: They have committed crimes against Iranian national security and they should be tried and punished for the crimes – this is how you combat terrorism, by punishing those who have been conducting terrorist operations.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: But you are saying that these are people who have committed crimes. You're not talking about terrorism yet. Have they committed terrorism? Do you see them as terrorists?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Yes, we do.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So you are going to try them as terrorists? Not like people who have gone and stolen a car or killed a person?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: No. We are going to try them on the charges for which they have been arrested, and I cannot go into the details of the charges of every individual.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: But you do consider them terrorists.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: We consider Al-Qaeda as a terrorist organization and those who are connected with Al-Qaeda as terrorists.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: And every member of Al-Qaeda that you hold is considered a terrorist.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Yes.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Now let us talk about Hamas, Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihad. Are they terrorist organizations?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), of which Iran is a member, does not consider them terrorist organizations.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Do you consider the act of exploding a school bus as an act of terrorism?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Nobody can condone an act in which innocent civilians are killed.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Do you condemn them?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: As I said, nobody can condone it. You need to address, again, the root causes if you want to prevent it. Condemning or condoning or rejecting or labeling something as terrorism will not resolve the problem. You can see that the policy of the current Israeli government, which has been using the fight against terrorism in order to apply pressure and increase repression of the Palestinians, has in fact backfired and led to more instances of violence. We want to be able, again, to operationalize the problem to solve it. I do not think that the problem will be resolved if you simply attack the symptom rather than the cause.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Do you really support Hamas?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: The entire Islamic world does.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: I'm talking about Iran.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I'm talking about the entire Islamic world because it is important to put this in the proper context. The entire Islamic world supports the struggle of the Palestinian people to fight occupation and to obtain a nation of their own.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Does Iran support Hamas?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Yes, but within the same general framework of political support that the entire Islamic world is providing to the Palestinian people, and the humanitarian support that we all provide to the Palestinians, in order to deal with the miseries that are caused by Israeli occupation and Israeli repression. This is the general policy that everybody is following in Iran and throughout the Islamic world.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: All right, what you are saying is that your relationship with Hamas is defined within the broader Islamic world's policy.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: That's it.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: It has nothing specific about it.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: No.

To be continued in the next issue: Hezbollah, Middle East peace, human rights, Iranian concerns, etc.

About AIC Insight

AIC Insight is a publication of the American Iranian Council. The mission of AIC is to foster conditions for the normalization of relations between the United States and Iran, involving the Iranian-American community in the dialogue, and inviting attention to developments in Iran that have a direct bearing on relations.

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