

In response to a hypothetical request by Secretary Rice for advice on policy toward Iran in the twenty-first century, Sam writes a memo with answer to that question.

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 11, 2005

To: Condoleeza Rice, the U.S. Secretary of State

From: Sam Sedaei

Subject: ***NEED OF CHANGE IN THE UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD IRAN***

Upon reelection for a second term, the Bush administration is making continuous efforts to mold U.S. foreign policy to rebuild the bridges to our democratic allies and at the same time maintain its tough stance against global terror. However, as this struggle for balance affects U.S. policy toward Iran, which is gradually becoming the focus of attention of policymakers, a crucial need for a second balance has been ignored by this administration. That balance is one that needs to be maintained to deter Iran from breaking anti-proliferation law while not spoiling the strong democratic and pro-western reformist movement in Iran and save the hardliners in that state.

Before reviewing policy recommendation that will make better U.S. policy, it is important to analyze the current policies of the United States and their effects on two important aspects: Nuclear non-proliferation, and democratic reform movement.

One of the most central current policy issues revolves around Iran's uranium enrichment program. Immediately after finding out about Iran's multiple violations of its safeguard obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Bush administration has accused Iran of having ambitions to develop nuclear weapons. Iran however has claimed that its nuclear program is for energy purposes. While the "E.U. Three" – Germany, France, and Great Britain – continue their talks with Iran to provide incentives for Iran to completely abandon its enrichment of uranium, the United States has refused to join

negotiations, and threatened to refer Iran to the U.N. Security Council for economic sanctions if it does not fully halt its nuclear program.

Before explaining the negative effects of the above policy, it is important to acknowledge some facts about the nature of the Iranian regime. Ayatollahs, most of whom are trained in Islamic institutions in the religious capital of Qom, are religious fanatics whose only goal is to maintain their hold on the country and impose their radical religious beliefs on individuals. However, being well aware of secular movements that are substantially threatening their theocracy, the ayatollahs understand that unless they immediately gain access to a powerful instrument with which they could blackmail their own people – and western countries – their extinction is inevitable. Based on this idea, it is important to acknowledge that it is very likely that Iran is in fact pursuing the construction of nuclear weapons. However, accusing Iran of developing nuclear weapons based on little intelligence and threatening to refer Iran to the U.N. Security Council has had two negative effects.

After the intelligence this administration relied on to justify invading Iraq proved to be faulty, the legitimacy of the actions of the U.S. was strongly questioned by our allies. By following a similar policy of accusing Iran of having ambitions for nuclear weapons based on no intelligence, this administration has farther reaffirmed some of the judgments made by other countries toward the policies of the United States.

A second negative effect has appeared inside Iran. One of the main strategies of the government of Iran to keep itself in power is to relentlessly expose people to anti-western propaganda. The clerics have spent twenty-six years making America appear to be a source of instability and a “bully” to the rest of the world. By repeatedly condemning Iran’s possible production of nuclear weapons (while withdrawing the United States from the Climate Change Treaty, Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban

Treaty), this administration's policy appears hypocritical, confirming many propagandistic ideas about the U.S. inside Iran.

Another important aspect upon which the policies of this administration have had negative as well as positive effects has been the ever-strengthening reformist movement inside Iran. Before reviewing those policies, it is important to review a few important facts about some of the events which have shaped the opinion of Iranians toward the west.

The revolution of 1979 was the most popular movement inside Iran, ending 2500 years of Persian monarchy. Even though the revolution has been associated with Islamic values, it is crucial to note that the values that sparked the revolution were much more nationalistic than Islamic. The revolution did not occur to place a theocracy in power; it was rather a long-term effect of the coup conducted by the CIA to overthrow the popular nationalist Mosaddeq in 1953, and a collective movement sparked by the masses that saw the shah as a pawn of the west. However, as students and anti-shah liberal intellectuals supported Ayatollah Khomeini's with-us-or-against-us revolution, clerics took over the government and put in place a theocracy. They are anti-Semitic clerics with little tolerance toward other religions, openly abusing basic human rights, and imprisoning or executing political dissidents and journalists by labeling them such things as "incompatible with Islam," "hurtful to the society," and "disrespectful to leader Khamenei." However, immediately following the Iran-Iraq War, the popularity of this regime declined exponentially to a currently estimated fifteen to twenty percent of the large Iranian middle class. In fact, most of the supporters of the regime depend on the clerics for survival to the connections that exist between the supporters and clerics.

Since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, a pro-western reformist movement has been rapidly growing and is now being supported by the vast majority of the population from all classes. As journalists write articles challenging the competency of the clerics, clerics arrest

them and ban their newspapers. Then the same journalists reappear under a different newspaper name, challenging the regime while they can before getting banned again. As the year 2004 came to a close, the reformist movement appeared stronger than ever.

Iran came under the scrutiny of the U.S. when Mr. Bush labeled Iran as part of an “Axis of Evil,” along with pre-war Iraq and North Korea. This act had some seriously negative effects on the health of the reformist movement. By labeling Iran as such, the Bush administration triggered strong anti-American feelings among Iranians. At a time when the reformers were admiring the west and America as an embodiment of freedom and democracy, the insensitive rhetoric of the Bush administration spoiled many of the reformers’ efforts while simultaneously creating a sense of patriotic nationalism, saving the hardliners in Iran.

However, a policy which has been welcomed by the people of Iran has been President Bush’s remarks during the State of the Union address. As young students in Tehran gathered in front of their banned satellite TVs to watch the State of the Union address, they cheered as President Bush declared America’s support for the people of Iran to stand for their liberty.

In order to decide what would be the right policy to undertake, it is important to understand a very important result that has emerged because of the unique situation in Iran. More specifically, the United States seemingly has no other option than to undertake a self-defeating foreign policy decision. The Iranian government is most likely to be pursuing instruments, such as nuclear weapons, to blackmail the west or its own people. If the United States stands aside and lets nuclear activities continue inside the republic, this may very well eventually result in construction of nuclear weapons by Iran. If the U.S. negotiates with the clerics, Iranians will condemn it, as they consider clerics their oppressors and negotiations with them as rewards for breaking non-proliferation obligations. And if the U.S., while pursuing its own nuclear programs, refers Iran to the U.N. Security Council for economic sanctions, Iranians will see that as hypocritical, again making the U.S. unpopular in the region. As all of

these policy options suggest, the uniqueness of the situation makes policy decisions toward Iran very difficult and sensitive.

Having reviewed some of the effects that recent policies of the United States toward Iran have had on the rest of the world, as well as an existing paradox which was introduced, it is important to understand what approach the United States needs to take to shape policies in a much more sensitive manner than it previously has.

Nuclear proliferation is a very important issue, and the United States is right in being concerned about the violations which have been made on Iran's part. However the United States need to consider the real possibility that Iran's nuclear program is in fact for energy purposes. The Iranian nuclear program which progressed more significantly in the 1990s has become more than a scientific venture; it has become a matter of national pride. Iran needs to be given the right to not only make its case that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, but once that is established, they should be supported by the west to pursue that program. The accusation of the development of nuclear weapons needs to become firm judgment only in light of concrete substantial evidence from intelligence sources and not by pre-existing theoretical claims upon which this administration has been relying, similar to those that were used to justify the war with Iraq.

The United States also needs to explain to Iran and the rest of the world in clear terms why the U.S., which at times has misused its access to chemical weapons by providing Saddam Hussein with those weapons to kill Iranians in the 1980s, is entitled to withdraw itself from international treaties and continue its own nuclear programs, while Iran should be prevented from having nuclear weapons. Lack of doing so is likely to ruin America's image as a symbol of fairness and freedom in Iran.

Before reviewing suitable policy with regards to the reformist movement, it is important to take note of one important misconception among policymakers. Many of the

policymakers in the U.S. who saw the images of Iranians celebrating the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Islamic revolution and chanting “death to America,” have based their policies on the assumption that those images represent the feelings of the majority of Iranians. However that assumption is quite far from reality. Every winter, as Iran gets closer to the time to celebrate the anniversary of the revolution, the clerics become seriously and justifiably concerned that people will boycott the celebrations. Memos go around in public institutions across the country, offering individuals one hundred overtime hours and coupons for food in return for individuals to travel to Tehran in buses provided by hardliners to celebrate anniversaries, burn American flags, and chant “death to America” and “death to Israel.” In addition, it is important to note that during last year’s demonstrations, approximately fifty thousand people from lower social classes celebrated the anniversary. However, that number is not an accurate representation of the feelings of seventy million people living in Iran.

Having considered these facts, another extremely critical policy which needs to be coupled with a tough stance on nuclear issues is to maintain positive, direct, and consistent dialogue with the people of Iran through satellite programs such as “Voice of America” and “Radio Farda.” The U.S. has not done enough to communicate in clear terms that its target is not the people, but rather the government of Iran. Through these channels, the United States needs to provide daily, if not hourly, support and direction for the reformers and those striving for freedom and democracy and admire their efforts in the international arena through nominating Iranian activists for noble peace prize and even U.S. Presidential Medals of Honor.

The United States needs to make a drastic departure from policies similar to those undertaken over the past half-century. If we look at any specific time through the history of relations between Iran and the U.S., any actions taken toward Iran have been to serve U.S. interests, either by interfering with Iran’s internal politics, such as CIA’s 1953 coup, or by

making military threats, such as the current ones being made. It is time for the United States to make a clear change in those policies and make support of the reformist movement a priority. Both the United States and the people of Iran will substantially benefit if similar methods that were used to bring attention to Iran's nuclear program be used by the U.S. to put the democratic movement, human rights and women's rights abuses by clerics under the spotlight. The U.S. needs to pressure Iran not just on issues that benefit the west, such as nuclear weapons, but also on those that serve the interests of reformers and the people of Iran.

Another important fact that needs to be kept in mind is that this policy needs to stay consistent. One of the characteristics of policies undertaken by the United States is that they change radically most of the time as presidents from different parties take office. However, the U.S. needs to acknowledge that to the people of Iran, the actions taken by any president represent the United States as a whole. Given the difficult political situation inside Iran, it is clear that the democratic movement is not likely to achieve full success in a four- or even eight-year period. However, constant moral support for the reformers needs to be provided in the same way that the containment policy was conducted throughout many years of the Cold War: with consistency and bipartisanship.

As the new century began, the reformist movement inside Iran, led by journalists and activists and supported by the majority of people, has proven to be stronger than ever. While the United States needs to continue monitoring Iran's nuclear program and pressure Iran to reveal its nuclear intentions, that pressure needs to be extended to such issues as violations of other conventions which Iran has signed, such as human rights and women's rights violations. The U.S. needs to actively support the people of Iran to make democratic change, clarifying that the target is the ayatollahs. While maintaining a negative rhetoric against Iran might result in some popularity for the president inside the U.S., if it is done without justifying those policies before our allies and the people of Iran, its effect on the reformist movement could be

tragic. The people of Iran have shown courage and thirst for freedom in their efforts to join the free world, and their pro-western democratic movement shall never be spoiled by insensitive rhetoric of the president or partisan politics inside the United States.