

Sam's review of the United States' contemporary policy toward Iran.

## **Iran and the contemporary U.S. foreign policy**

The standoff between Iran and the United States, which dates back to the outbreak of the revolution of 1979, has been the longest standoff the U.S. has ever been in toward any other nation in its history. As one studies the components of the contemporary U.S. foreign policy with regards to Iran and analyzes the statements released by the executive branch and the Bush administration, it becomes evident that this administration's stated primary goal is to protect the American people from terror created by the government of Iran by forcing that country to give up its nuclear ambitions and support for international terror, and its secondary goal is to encourage reform and change inside Iran by supporting its people in their struggle to democratize.

In order for one to understand the United States foreign policy toward Iran, it is imperative for her to recognize three major categories of issues that the Bush administration has specifically addressed its concerns about, as well as the means it claims to have taken to deal with those issues. Those three categories of concerns are Iran's nuclear program and development of biological weapons, its ideological and military support for international terrorism, and its poor human rights record.

The first and seemingly foremost concern of the Bush administration with regards to Iran has been Iran's nuclear technology development. During a visit to the United Kingdom, John Bolton, the Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security stated, "To date, two reports by the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency ("IAEA") have established that Iran is in violation – in multiple instances – of its safeguards obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). While Iran has consistently denied any program to develop nuclear weapons, the large and still-growing

number of contradictions, inconsistencies and prevarications in its shifting explanations to the IAEA demonstrate convincingly that Iran is actively concealing a weapons program.” (Bolton 2003a) In addition and more recently, John Wolf, Assistant Secretary of Non-proliferation stated “We should be deeply concerned by Iran’s desire to continue developing a full nuclear fuel cycle capability and by its repeated lack of transparency in almost all aspects of its nuclear program.” (Wolf 2004) As the statements above indicate, the U.S. State Department of the Bush administration has expressed real concern about Iran’s nuclear program, especially because of its lack of transparency and the Republic’s alleged conduction of nuclear activities in a covert manner.

Despite the Iranian government’s claim that Iran is only developing nuclear technology to be used as energy source, this administration believes that Iran’s nuclear program is aimed at building nuclear weapons. As John Wolf stated, “For the United States, it is clear; Iran long has been developing capabilities for producing nuclear weapons. We have said so publicly for more than a decade, and the facts revealed the past twelve months unambiguously support this conclusion.” (Wolf 2004) President Bush has also showed his concern for the spread of weapons of mass destruction and Russia’s nuclear assistance to Iran by stating, “I am concerned about some reports of the proliferation of weapons throughout – on Russia's southern border, for example, countries on her southern border, and I'll bring that subject up. I think it's important for Russia to hear that our Nation is concerned about the spreading of weapons of mass destruction.” (Bush 2001g, 670-675) As the executive statements indicate, the United States is convinced that Iran is determined to build nuclear weapons.

Convinced that Iran is pursuing the construction of nuclear weapons, the policy of the Bush administration has been presented clearly by John Bolton, who stated “What we ask for is not much – only what is necessary to protect our security and to prevent Iran

from developing nuclear weapons and other WMD. All that Iran must do is to abide by the treaties it has signed banning weapons of mass destruction and stop its program to develop ballistic missiles.” (Bolton 2004a) Furthermore, Wolf justifies that policy by saying “We cannot let Iran, a leading sponsor of international terrorism, acquire the most destructive weapons and the means to deliver them to Europe, most of central Asia and the Middle East, or beyond.” (Bolton 2004a) The continuing threats made by the Iranian government toward Israeli and American interests, and its support for international terrorism have resulted in the United States doing what it can to prevent the Islamic Republic from obtaining nuclear and biological weapons. The prevention of such nuclear weapons program, if such a program is existent, is viewed as effective means of protecting the security of American interests at home and abroad.

A second major current concern of the United States with respect to Iran is the latter’s ongoing support for international terrorist organizations. Paula DeSutter, Assistant Secretary of Verification and Compliance, clarified these concerns by stating, “Iran is the most active state sponsor of terrorism. Its Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and Ministry of Intelligence and Security continue to be involved in the planning and support of terrorist acts and continue to support a variety of groups that use terrorism to pursue their goals.” (DeSutter 2003) Mrs. DeSutter characterized the form of this sponsorship of terrorism as “funding, providing safe haven, training, and weapons to a wide variety of terrorist groups including Lebanese Hizballah, HAMAS, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Liberation Front for Palestine-General Command.” (DeSutter 2003) The United States and the Bush administration have showed great concern over Iran’s support for international organizations, mainly because those terrorist organizations are collectively hostile to the United States and its interests across the

world. United States especially believes that this support for international terrorist organizations has cut the speed of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The current government of the United States has employed a policy to avert sponsorship of international terrorism, which is best clarified by Paula DeSutter. She Stated, “We call on Iran to abide by the requirements of UN Security Council Resolution 1373<sup>1</sup> to deny safe-haven to those who plan, support, or commit terrorist acts and to affirmatively take steps to prevent the commission of terrorist acts by providing early warning to other states by exchange of information. Furthermore, we call on Iran to turn over any al-Qaida [members] to the U.S. or to third countries for interrogation.”

(DeSutter 2003) The policy of the United States on this matter is simple; Iran needs to halt the sponsorship of international terrorism to assist the progress of the war on terror launched by the Bush administration following the eve of September eleventh attacks.

The third major concern of the Bush administration with regards to Iran surrounds the Islamic Republic’s human rights record. Richard Armitage, the Deputy Secretary of State, observed the transformation inside Iran and the role America should play in that transformation when he stated, “Iran is a country in the midst of a tremendous transformation, and I believe American policy can affect the direction Iran will take. This is a complex situation, but if you will allow a simplification: today in Iran, there is a struggle between destructive elements of Iran’s society and leadership, who want to keep the country mired in a violent, corrupt, and insular past, and a forward-looking popular movement, which wants a more engaged and modern Iran to emerge.” (Armitage 2003b)

The Bush administration, similar to its predecessor, has repeatedly distinguished between

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<sup>1</sup> Among other obligations, this resolution obligates all nations to “prohibit their nationals or any persons and entities within their territories from making any funds, financial assets or economic resources or financial or other related services available, directly or indirectly, for the benefit of persons who commit or attempt to commit or facilitate or participate in the commission of terrorist acts, of entities owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by such persons and of persons and entities acting on behalf of or at the direction of such persons.”

the people of Iran and the government of Iran. While the Iranian government is viewed as the top sponsor of international terrorism, the U.S. has described the people of Iran as freedom-loving people in struggle to make change. Armitage remarked, "...Iran's poor human rights record ... along with the government's oppressive and corrupt centralized economic policy, shake the confidence of the international community and deny the Iranian people the quality of life commensurate with the country's rich human and natural resources." (Armitage 2003b) This administration has recognized the quiet struggle, which has been taking place inside Iran, and has decided that the United States should play a role in that struggle.

To describe the Bush administration's policy with respect to the people of Iran, Armitage stated, "We seek to counter the government of Iran's negative and destructive policies and actions, while encouraging constructive policies and actions and engaging in a direct dialogue with the Iranian people about the freedoms they want for their own country." (Armitage 2003) The United States has employed the policy of isolating the government of Iran while communicating with the people of Iran and showing support for their struggle to topple the Islamic regime. The United States has pursued this policy through Radio and TV. Armitage expressed this policy by stating, "We believe we can encourage the triumph of public resolve by engaging in direct communication with the people of Iran. We are doing this through Radio ... and television broadcasts into Iran." (Armitage 2003b) Also addressing the policy of the United States with respect to human rights violations inside Iran, Armitage claimed, "We are actively seeking a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran in the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee or at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights." (Armitage 2003b) By supporting the people of Iran and reformers in their struggle to make change, the United States believes that it is promoting its own interests in two ways. First, as president Bush stated, "In our energy

review, we're looking at all opportunities to create more energy supply, to take the pressure off of price.” (Bush 2001d, 420-422) Hence, having a new and more friendly government in Iran, the country which possesses the second largest supply of natural gas in the world as well as it’s oil which is estimated to last for at least a few more hundreds of years based on the current rate of extraction, this administration would be able to partially implement its energy goal and policy as stated above. The second way in which the interest of the United States would be promoted is that the overthrow the current regime in Iran would greatly reduce the support for international terrorism, which will serve both the United States, as well as its allies.

President Bush reaffirmed the United States’ policy with regards to all three of these concerns in one statement during the first State of the Union address of his second term. He stated, “Today, Iran remains the world's primary state sponsor of terror – pursuing nuclear weapons while depriving its people of the freedom they seek and deserve. We are working with European allies to make clear to the Iranian regime that it must give up its uranium enrichment program and any plutonium reprocessing, and end its support for terror. And to the Iranian people, I say tonight: As you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you.” (Bush 2005) Hence the United States foreign policy toward Iran is likely to remain similar to how it has been in past, which is to continue pressuring the Iranian government to give up its enrichment of uranium and other nuclear projects, while encouraging the people of Iran to fight for internal reform and resist the clerical rule.

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