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AIC INSIGHT

AIC Insight Highlights

It is Time for a New Approach

We are pleased to publish the second issue of *AIC Insight*. The first issue is available at the AIC website and through our office. We are happy to report that the publication received high marks from many who took the time to reflect on its contents. We are most grateful for the feedback we received from our colleagues.

While predicting Iran's future has ever been a hazardous task, we are delighted that our predictions about the management composition of the Iranian Seventh Parliament have now been confirmed. In the next issue we will offer our predictions about the next presidential elections in Iran. Will the Iranian *Revanchists* win the Presidency as well?

In the current issue, we have published the remaining portion of the interview with Iran's Ambassador Zarif and a new interview with Ambassador Thomas Pickering, who visited Iran this past spring. We are certain our readers will appreciate what these interviews offer. We plan to publish an interview in every issue of *AIC Insight*.

US-Iran relations have taken a turn for the worse in the past few months. The struggle over Iran's nuclear programs continues, and the tension rose high at the June meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency when Iran was chastised for lack of full cooperation. Iran was particularly dismayed to see that its European collaborators were no more hospitable.

More trouble is expected ahead when in September the matter is again taken up by IAEA. Will Iran be reported to the UN Security Council and subjected to multilateral sanctions? And if this happens, how will Iran react? Will Iran leave the Non-Proliferation Treaty and terminate cooperation with IAEA? Some powerful figures in Tehran are threatening to do just that.

The 9/11 Commission's report was also discouraging. The finding that Iran has allowed safe passage to Al-Qaeda people is as yet imprecise with regard to circumstance and Iran's intention. While the Acting CIA Director, Mr. John

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Interview with Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering June 15, 2004

Interviewer: Dr. Hooshang Amirahmadi



Today is June 15, 2004. I am in the (Arlington, VA) office of Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering, Senior Vice President of the Boeing Company, former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs during President Clinton's administration, and former Ambassador to the United Nations, to the Russian Federation, India, Israel, El Salvador, Nigeria, and Jordan. Ambassador Pickering is also on the Board of Directors of the American Iranian Council. He visited Iran from April 17 to May 3, 2004. AIC Insight interviewed the Ambassador at the first opportunity after his return from Iran.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Ambassador, thank you very much for agreeing to give this interview to *AIC Insight*. The goal of *AIC Insight* is to try to help the community understand the concerns in the United States vis-à-vis Iran, and to see if there is anything that can be done to get a better understanding. I understand that you are the highest ranking American official, current or former, to visit Iran in the last twenty-five years. Is that right?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I'm not sure of that. There are no ranks among former officials.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Was this your first visit?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: No, I visited Iran several times between roughly 1970 and 1978, but the last time that I was there was in 1978.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Right in the middle of the Revolution?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: No, I actually attended the meeting that President Carter had or-

ganized with the Shah. He invited King Hussein; I was Ambassador to Jordan, so I went to the meeting with King Hussein on New Year's Day 1978.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: How long did you visit the last time?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I was in Iran from the seventeenth of April to the third of May on what was essentially a tourist visit.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Which places did you see?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I went to Tehran, Kermanshah, Hamedan, Qom, Nain, Isfahan, Yazd, Kerman, and Shiraz.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Those are great and historic places to see. I hope you enjoyed it.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I did. It was a very enjoyable and interesting trip, with lots of opportunities to see Iran, to meet Iranians informally and unofficially, and to have a chance to see the country, because we traveled mostly by bus.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Did you meet any particularly important people?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: We didn't seek to have important people meet us, but I was met, because of my aviation connections, by the Minister of Road and Transport, and we had a good conversation, both on business – although as you know, because of sanctions, Boeing cannot sell any aircraft to Tehran – and also we had a good discussion of developments in US-Iranian relations and events in both countries as we saw them.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: What did the Minister think about US-Iran relations?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: He said he wanted to see improvement.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: What did this trip change in your perspective?

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McLaughlin, does not believe that Iran actually had any direct role in 9/11, President Bush has said that his Administration is looking into the matter. The case remains wide open.

In the wake of the heightened dispute over Iran's nuclear programs, the 9/11 Commission report, and the disappointing recent Iranian parliamentary elections, certain members of the neoconservatives are again calling for a military strike against Iran. Unconfirmed reports have also maintained that Israel may be contemplating striking at Iran's nuclear facilities if the United States ignores the threat. Iran has in the past said that it will respond to any such act immediately and forcefully.

While these developments were taking place, the Council on Foreign Relations established a Task Force to look into what might be done with US-Iran relations. The group was co-chaired by Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor under President Jimmy Carter, and Dr. Robert Gate, former CIA Director under President George Bush and current President of Texas A&M University.

The Task Force, directed by Dr. Suzanne Maloney of the Council on Foreign Relations, issued its report, entitled "Iran: Time for a New Approach," in late July. It recommended that "limited and selective engagement" with the Islamic Republic is in the best interest of the United States. This recommendation followed the group's understanding that "Iran is not on the verge of another revolution."

Mr. Richard Matzke, AIC co-chairman, served as a member of the Task Force. While endorsing the report of the Task Force, he amended the following statement to it under "Additional and Dissenting Views:"

"In consideration of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's report of July 7, 2004, on Iraq and 9/11, I believe the Council on Foreign Relations Task Force report on Iran should be very circumspect on what it concludes is happening in Iran. Until such time as U.S. intelligence is confirmed reliable, or Americans can be assured the Administration has not distorted the intelligence it receives, the report should be very cautious on what it recommends based on the assumption its intelligence is correct.

Furthermore, I would have preferred that the final report dealt with engagement, beginning with subjects of common interest to the United States and Iran, rather than suggesting that engagement selectively deal only with well known but unconfirmed contentious subjects. It is certain Iran would have

its own list of similar issues that it perceived to threaten its security. This is not a starting point for effective engagement.

In a relative sense, in the region, I do not agree that Iran is an unstable country. In fact, it will may be the most stable. Although not quantified, it appears that those who have long been supported most aggressively by the United States have a much higher potential for instability than does Iran.

The report's conclusion that isolation, containment, sanctions, and the like have failed as foreign policy practices by the United States is welcomed. And the conclusion that the United States should adopt measures to broaden political, cultural and economic linkages with the people of Iran is even more welcomed."

Mr. Matzke's advice must be considered carefully and seriously. As the war against Iraq has shown, complacency is harmful, to say the least. Before that war, intelligence and non-intelligence information about Iraq was accepted as undisputed truth, or at least was not questioned. Even those who should have known about the problem with the information remained complacent or acquiesced. Today, many of these same people criticize President George W. Bush for acting upon inaccurate information.

In the next two months before the US Presidential elections, the state of US-Iran relations will most likely further deteriorate. Although neither party wanted to make Iran an election issue, the environment may change as President Bush and Senator John F. Kerry continue to portray themselves as strong leaders on matters of national security. In a recent exchange, the two men competed over a tougher stand against Iran.

The expected deteriorating trend notwithstanding, US-Iran relations will remain a matter for the next administration to tackle. It is almost unanimously expected that Iran will become the most important foreign policy issue for the next administration. President Bush in his second term is expected to take either a peace or a war approach to Iran, while a President Kerry will most likely follow a policy more or less recommended by the CFR's Task Force.

Meanwhile, the American Iranian Council will continue to implement its project, "Building Better US-Iran Relations." The project includes policy conferences, publication of *AIC Insight*, a study mission to Iran, and efforts to build a constituency for dialogue and better understanding between the two great nations. It is our conviction that engagement is in the best interest of the United States, and it serves the aspirations of the Iranian people for democracy and development.

On this last point, let us quote Professor Shaul

Bakhash of George Mason University. As a member of the CFR's Task Force, he amended the following statement to the Report of the Task Force under "Additional and Dissenting Views:"

"I wish to stress that support for dialogue and diplomatic and economic relations between Iran and the United States does not imply acquiescence in the violation by the Iranian government of the civil rights and liberties of its own citizens. Some Iranians understandably fear that relations with the United States will reinforce the status quo and therefore regime durability in Iran. In fact, any study of Iranian history over the last century and more suggests that interaction with the outside world greatly accelerates, rather than hinders, the pace of internal political change. I believe enmeshing Iran with the international community, expanding trade, and improving economic opportunity and the conditions for the growth of the middle class will strengthen, not weaken, the democratic forces in Iran."

The American Iranian Council is proud to have pioneered the idea that in US-Iran relations, engagement is the right path. It provides for global peace and regional security, facilitates transition to democracy and respect for human rights in Iran, and improves the economic well-being of all involved. "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.

We invite those who do not share our perspective to consider this: In the last 25 years, some 30 dictatorships have made the 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.

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 ad-

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Interview with Ambassador Pickering

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AMBASSADOR PICKERING: It gave me an opportunity to get caught up to date with Iran. I had never traveled in the past outside of Tehran, so I had no basis for comparison, and that meant that I was seeing both the sites of tourist and historical interest for the first time, and also having a chance to see the countryside and to talk with ordinary Iranians.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Did anything especially impress you?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I think that I would highlight for friends three or four things that were of interest. One, of course, is that there is a tremendous amount of history, architecture, and other things of interest to see in Iran, and it's well worth the time to go there for a visit. Secondly, we were treated very well. Nobody in any way at all treated us as if we were anything but honored guests. People came up to us on the street and spoke to us, obviously self-selected because they assumed that we were foreigners and that we probably spoke English, and many of them, particularly younger Iranians, wanted to try out their English on us to see what we would say to them, and about their English. We also had an opportunity to see development in the country. I was very impressed by highway building and by light industry development. Of course we were there at the nicest time in the spring, so agricultural development looked very good. We were, I think, all impressed by the sense that the people we met were very proud of being Iranians, or Persians, as they often described themselves. They were proud of their language, of their history, of their culture, and their cohesion as a people, and they spoke with a deep sense of national pride.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Did you feel that the people that spoke to you were very much for normalization of relations between the US and Iran, if that issue came up?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I would say the following: that people were surprised to find Americans visiting, although some Americans have visited, and they expressed their pleasure at seeing Americans. They expressed no general disapproval at all. Iranians seemed to be pleased at the change in Iraq, even if they didn't particularly like the United States being there, although they never expressed the latter views to us. They seemed to be interested in the hope that maybe relations could be improved. People seemed to want to speak freely; we didn't

appear to be watched or under surveillance, and the opportunity to wander around the streets fairly openly was very much a part of what we were doing. And people seemed to speak with a sense that they too hoped for change in our relationships, and some of them spoke quite freely about changes in Iran. We had a group of men and women and we were approached by more women than men, which was interesting, and by more young people than older people, and we had a feeling from stories that we heard, and from what people said, that while there was respect for the Revolution, there was also concern about what seemed to some of them to be excesses. And I think that Iranians have always had a sense of humor, and some of this has now been turned on the mullahs.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Let me focus this interview on US-Iran relations. How would you characterize the US policy toward Iran today? Regime change, open to dialogue, or what? And how is the policy today different from the policy under President Clinton?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: The US government can speak very well for itself on this part; I cannot. Some in government have talked of regime change, yet there has been cooperation on Afghanistan. I would hope to see dialogue develop, but it seems we are not yet there. The Clinton Administration was ready for dialogue; seemingly Iran was not.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: How do you view the state of US-Iran relations? Where are we now, and where do you think we will be following the Presidential elections this November?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: US-Iran relations need to be improved and there are numerous obstacles to overcome. It is too early to say whether the US elections in November will make a difference for either Republicans or Democrats in the US, to say nothing of what the impact will be inside Iran.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: You have spent a lifetime in helping build the intellectual and diplomatic infrastructure of foreign policy in this country. You have seen Iran. Given the challenges that the United States faces in the region and in Iraq, what role do you think Iran can play?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I think that visits are extremely important. But they don't create a total impression of everything; one has to add to it, obviously, what people are saying to each other, as

well as what people have been doing in the past and present and what their intentions are for the future. So it's still only part of an opportunity to understand the situation, not the totality. For the United States, problems and issues in the region run the gamut from the Arab-Israeli peace settlement issue, to Iraq, with all of its problems, which I think Americans are now beginning to understand more clearly. There is also the hope for the future of Iraq and a peaceful and stable region, and of course a hope for the end of the separation that exists between the United States and Iran on an official basis. Many of us have had this hope for years, regardless of differences and regardless of unmeetable demands and immovable principles on both sides – a hope that there will emerge a preference for discussion and conversation, for dialogue, leading to negotiation as a way to end this separation. It is clear to all of us who both visited Iran and who know something about it, and I don't consider myself in any way an expert, that Iran will play, and has already played, an important role in this region, and in its security, and in many other aspects of the region. Iran lives in an important neighborhood, and it is also potentially, for all of the countries of the region, an extremely important neighbor.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Does the United States see Iran as a rival, a competitor or a threat? Is the United States willing to make Iran into a partner?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I don't believe Americans see Iran as a rival; but some see it as a threat to the region, and perhaps beyond, especially if you take into account Iran's nuclear and missile programs.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Can you help us understand the American vision of a future Iran? What kind of Iran does the United States want?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, first, I can't speak officially. Secondly, there may be differing views in the United States about Iran and its future. I can only speak for myself. But I would think that most Americans would join me in saying that they want to see a stable Iran, they want reform, and a democratic future for the region, based on the belief that the primary beneficiaries of democracy in Iran will be the people of Iran and the people of the region. Americans are very much attached to the idea that if people have an opportunity to make choices about their own government, eventually they will make wise choices, choices that better meet their own needs than the choices other people make for them. That in essence is one of the principles of democracy.

It's not our role to impose democracy, but it's our role to help people who want to make choices about their own future, to encourage them, to support them, and to find ways that we can assist them,

obviously in a peaceful way, to bring about the changes they want within their own countries and in their own regions. In the long run, it's to the benefit of the people in the region, and I think what's best for them will be best for the rest of us around the world.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: How do you characterize the nature of the US-Iran dispute, particularly from the American side? Is it geopolitical, ideological, or just a misunderstanding? And what is it that keeps these two countries, and particularly keeps the American side, from talking?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, I think the diplomats have always tried to understand the nature of the differences on both sides, and one of the values of visiting a country, and of talking with representatives of a country, is to begin to understand what they consider to be the set of differences. If you look on the American side, in simplest terms, there are at least three major areas of difference. I'd say the most important one, maybe the most difficult one, and the one where there may be the greatest differences, has to do with weapons of mass destruction and delivery vehicles, particularly the nuclear program of Iran. There are Americans who feel, and I join them, that it would be a serious mistake for Iran to try to construct or possess nuclear weapons, or long-range vehicles to deliver them. And I think that we also feel strongly about chemical and biological weapons.

The second area has to do with the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli dispute, and there are two facets to this. One has to do with the support from Iran

for organizations that conduct terrorist activities in the region. Iran may say it feels justified in this, but since September 11 in particular, that's a very hard sell for Americans. The other is what I guess we'd have to call Iranian opposition to a peaceful settlement of the dispute between Israelis and Palestinians. The Iranians have made their own statements about this, and there may be some change in that regard; one can only hope that that's the case.

The third area has to do with Iran's treatment of its own people, particularly some of the minorities, and especially the religious minorities, and these issues have also attracted some American attention.

On the other side, I've tried to understand Iranian concerns about the United States, and they seem to be in several important areas. Obviously, I'm not a spokesman for Iran, so I can only tell you what I hear and perceive here. One important concern is whether or not the United States is determined to try to use force and other methods to change the leadership or to effect regime change in Iran. Another issue is Iran's expressed concern about good faith and consistency in American policies toward Iran.

It's been fascinating to follow the history of American-Iranian relations. In those times and circumstances when the United States has been willing to talk, Iran has not been. And we now see perhaps the opposite case. I've never thought that you needed to pay a price for talking, or that that should be asked to pay a price for talking, but you should be able and committed to try to make progress, and talking is the basis for doing so. I think that on the Iranian side, obviously there are deep concerns

about the unsettled issues coming out of the Revolution, and the disappearance of the Shah and his regime, and the financial questions that still have to be resolved by both sides in the Hague. I suspect, although I see no signs of it, that there are still deep concerns in Iran about everything from the shooting down of the airliner to the conflict we had over mining, over reflagging, over the oil platforms in the Persian Gulf during the last years of the Iran-Iraq war in 1987-88. Those are all issues that seemingly could be easily resolved, but they nevertheless are still out there. Each side seems to have a pretty heavy catalogue of issues to be discussed.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: The list you provide does not suggest to me that the issues standing between the two countries are ideological, for example, the Islamic nature of the regime, but rather political or geopolitical. Is this correct?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Ideology probably plays a role in the view of each side. However, the practical differences are today more important. Separating the two, while desirable, will not be easy, especially without developing contacts for that purpose.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Iran maintains that all issues standing between Washington and Tehran are negotiable, except that the lack of trust prevents them from beginning a serious dialogue. Do you agree with this assessment and if so, what would you suggest they do to build trust?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Iran holds to its own views. I have already suggested that dialogue

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ditional 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 Shiite and other leaders there. The United States must give Iran the opportunity to do so and then reward it for its cooperation.

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 Ira-

nian 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. It is time that Washington and Tehran listen to voice of reason and put their national interests above their ideological and political interests. It is time for a new approach.

or contacts can help to ease problems and hopefully to build trust.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Are these issues operational in terms of negotiation? In my interview with Iran's Ambassador, Dr. Javad Zarif, for the first issue of *AIC Insight*, he kept saying that these are public concerns, they are good for intellectual discussions, but they really are not well formulated or specific enough for a private negotiation. He kept saying, for example, regarding US concerns about nuclear technology: what is it that at the end of the day will satisfy the United States? Will the US ever agree to live with an Iran that has nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, or does the US want it all gone?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, the US government will have to speak for itself. I have great respect for Ambassador Zarif and his point of view, and he's a very good spokesman for Iran and what its interests are and where it wants to go, and he should be listened to for that reason alone with great care. I believe that on the United States side, our nonproliferation policy has been clear from one administration to the next, and that policy has always been against the acquisition of military nuclear power. The concern has been that recent proliferators have tended, as the United States believes Iran has, to use peaceful programs under the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) and Atoms for Peace as the basis for developing military programs. So while on the one hand, American objectives are very clear, on the other hand, the steps and activities that need to be taken by countries of proliferation concern, to make it clear that on a permanent basis they are not interested in proliferation, can vary.

One can look at Libya as one example, or Brazil, or South Africa, or even Argentina, or South Korea, or Taiwan as countries that have all stepped back from their military programs. It doesn't mean they all don't have peaceful programs, but it means that they have been able to satisfy the international community through a series of steps and actions. This might be seen as simply a negotiating task to get Iran's agreement over the scope and future of its nuclear programs. However, given the degree of distrust, any solution would have to include mutually agreeable methods of verification. Also, the question of the acquisition of nuclear weapons, from the perspective of the United States and its traditional policy, is not something that we would consider to be reversible.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: If I hear you correctly, if Iran could convince the international community and the

United States in particular that its nuclear program is for a peaceful purpose, it is possible that Iran could have this peaceful nuclear technology?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I think that this approach is the essential bargain of the NPT. It's an approach to the solution of the problem that has been set back, because the fault of the NPT is that it allows people to do everything right to the threshold of nuclear weapons under the treaty, and then denounce the treaty, or abrogate the treaty, for themselves, and move rapidly to a nuclear weapon posture. And that was never the original intention; it was never what



The Deputy Chief of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Asadollah Sabouri, speaks to the media during his news conference in Tebran, Iran, Sunday, Aug. 22, 2004. Iran said Sunday it was planning to build more nuclear power plants with Russian help, ignoring U.S. concerns that byproducts from the plants could be used to manufacture atomic bombs. (AP Photo/Nabid Salemi)

one would call the original bargain, in which people postulated the notion that they would receive peaceful support if they stayed out of military nuclear activities. You can go back and read General Eisenhower's original concept when he was President; that was very much what he had in mind. And so this has raised very difficult questions: is there a clear-cut line, and if so, how does it get dealt with?

I'm not engaged in those negotiations at the present time, and the US has been very, very careful not to tell Iran all peaceful uses are permitted, all military uses are forbidden, and we have complete trust once you tell us that that will be the case. Iran's record unfortunately is a checkered one. Recent statements by Iranians and recent revelations and discoveries inside Iran don't lead one to conclude at the moment that the United States should rely heavily on Iranian statements about what they're doing. They would much rather rely on systems of verification. Other questions also have to be addressed, including US concern that uranium enrichment and reprocess-

ing could put Iran in a position someday suddenly to cancel the Non-Proliferation Treaty and move rapidly to a military program. Here we see some reluctance on the Iranian side, even in their seemingly fruitful, but now also somewhat checkered conversations with the Europeans over the nuclear issue.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said, and Ambassador Zarif reiterated in the interview with me, that the Iran nuclear infrastructure is open to American investment. They can come, just like the Russians, and participate in its development. If they don't trust us, why don't they come and work with us? What is wrong with that proposal? Why doesn't the US take Iran up on that offer?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, I'm not engaged in the negotiations here, that's very important. But first of all, we would have no interest in investing in the Iranian infrastructure for nuclear development, quite the contrary. We've always thought that Iran, as an oil and gas-rich country, has little justification for heavy future reliance on nuclear electrical power. Secondly, one never knows without an adequate system of verification what's going on in one's investment areas. This has always been the problem. We've been told some things about an Iranian program, only to find through revelations of later information that oh, indeed, there was another program in another place doing different kinds of things. These are the kind of things that add to the controversy.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Well, Iran's oil and gas sector is under US sanctions for now and that is another problem. But that aside, I remember in the seventies, the United States had the mindset that Iran needed nuclear technology for energy purposes. In fact, the first nuclear power technology that Iran acquired was from the United States. After the Revolution, this US position changed. Again, in the discussion with Ambassador Zarif, I discussed this issue with him and told the Ambassador that the reason the Americans changed their mind on whether Iran needs nuclear energy or not, is that they think Iran's intentions have changed, or at least that's how they see it. I suggested to Dr. Zarif that Iran has a problem with making that intention more explicitly known to the Americans. The question I have for you is, what can Iran do to make that intention more explicit, to convince the American administration that it does not intend to build bombs, as they have said at the highest levels of authority, including Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country's top leader?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I think the American administration has made it clear to Iran what it would like to see. It's not for me to do that. And I think that Iran has found it difficult to deal with those requests, and as a result this uncertainty continues. So if you ask the question seriously what Iran can do, then I would say, make sure that it understands what the US administration would like to see done, and then follow through, just as it has asked the Europeans the same question, and seemingly begun to follow through. But then we see on the Iranian side all kinds of statements and reservations and difficulties. I admit that there obviously seem to be differences inside Iran on how to deal with this situation.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Ambassador, you say that the US has told Iranians what it wants to see. Is this public?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I don't think it was public information. I don't know specifically. I can assure you that I believe Iran knows, perhaps indirectly from the Europeans, perhaps directly from what it reads, what the United States would like to see.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Next, you raised the issue of the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian problem; there doesn't seem to be an Arab-Israeli problem any more, it is all about the Palestinian-Israeli problem these days!

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Oh no, there's an Arab-Israeli problem. There's no peace with Syria, and of course with Lebanon. No peace yet with Iraq either, although one could hope that countries distant from the area of conflict would not be major obstacles to peace.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Iran has accepted the two-state solution. And according to Ambassador Zarif, whatever the Palestinians accept is acceptable to Iran, and he said in the interview that Iran is for the two peoples, two-state solution. What is wrong with this statement, or with this position?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, I think that this has come recently. People are uncertain as to how long it will last, and people are uncertain as to whether it represents the true position. And that uncertainty is of course magnified by what at least the United States believes it sees in continued Iranian support and help for groups that use violence and terror to oppose the settlement.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: On the peace front, obviously the problem is largely because of Iran's view of Israel. What view of Iran regarding Israel would be acceptable to the American administration? I mean,

what it is that Iran should do vis-à-vis Israel that would be acceptable? Normalize relations, just stay away, say nothing, normalize its opposition – what is it that Iran should do in this particular situation?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I think that the issue is much deeper than Iranian views about Israel. It may be that Iran would like to justify its views on the basis of what it thinks about Israel, but that's a different situation. It's not for me to prescribe either for the Israelis or the Iranians what they should do or how they should behave.

It was always fascinating to me, as the American Ambassador to Israel between 1985 and 1988, that when I talked about this issue with people like Yitzhak Rabin, he would always tell me that the United States has to find a way to develop closer

“It was always fascinating to me, as the American Ambassador to Israel between 1985 and 1988, that when I talked about the issue [of US-Iran relations] with people like Yitzhak Rabin, he would always tell me that the United States has to find a way to develop closer relationships with Iran. He said Iran is an important country, and we can't neglect Iran.” — Amb. Pickering

relationships with Iran. He said Iran is an important country, and we can't neglect Iran. And despite the then recent Revolution in Iran, he was very much interested in Iran and thought it was very important to develop a change in the relationship. So I suppose that Rabin's vision for the future of Iran and Israel was not a terrible one.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Do you think it has changed now, under Mr. Sharon's administration?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, I think that each Israeli administration has its own view. He had his own particular view. And I would suspect that it will change again.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: On human rights and democracy. President Bush, whether we like that administration's policy in Iraq or not, has made a courageous statement concerning democracy for the greater Middle East. He basically says that until and unless these countries become democratic, they're going to have problems. And I personally subscribe to that idea, that democracy is the key in creating a better world, in the Middle East and elsewhere. What could the US do to help democracy develop in Iran, in your view? Is there anything the US is doing that is helping? Is what the US is doing these days hurt-

ing democracy? I mean, President Bush says one thing, but there are other things done that make some people think that the policy is designed to have an impact in exactly the opposite direction. This has happened in Iran, at least in the short run.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, I think that at the moment, that kind of harsh criticism of the President's intentions may be unfair. On the other hand, it's not the way with the US to go around changing governmental systems all around the world. We can help and assist people who believe that change for the future is the right way to proceed, and I would presume and hope that we do. I would hope that we would continue to use international broadcasting to talk to Iranians, that we would welcome Iranians here, that we would use their opportunities to visit, study, and learn here to help them understand what works in democracy, what doesn't work, how it might be best applied in Iran. That's a long way from seeing the Middle East immediately transformed into a kind of nirvana of Swiss democracy.

But I think these are long-term issues and they will have to be pursued with some care over a period of time. The emphasis continues to need to be put on the needs of the Iranian people, and what I observed when I was there in Iran was people, from my perspective, who were ready to and interested in and happy to try to develop their own decisions on the issues. I think that recent elections in Iran, unlike previous elections, were a disappointment in that regard. I think those things need to be kept in mind. But however much the United States would like to do it, it is not like instant coffee.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Are third party forces, such as regional states or non-state rejectionist forces, important in US-Iran relations? If so, how could Washington and Tehran respond to such forces?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Europeans have helped to try to develop progress on the nuclear question. Russia has played a large role in Iran's nuclear development since 1990. The US is concerned by what it sees as some Iranian support for or sheltering of al-Qaeda. Again, the best response would be to make clear views on these issues on both sides, which hopefully will be positive, and act accordingly.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Now, that brings me to a very important question regarding the latest models of US relationships with dictatorships. Basically, if I'm not mistaken, there are four models. One is the model of trade and diplomacy, for example, what the United States used vis-à-vis South Korea and Taiwan. This model worked in South Korea and Taiwan. Those countries were dictatorships, and they

became gradually democratic over time.

The second model has been, of course, the model of sanctions that we have used against Cuba, against Iran, against Iraq, and so on. And it seems to me that it has failed in almost every single case, even multilaterally in the case of Iraq, where at the end we had to go and fight Saddam Hussein and get him out of there by military force.

The third model is the military approach, which the US used in Grenada, in Afghanistan, and now in Iraq; and it seems to me that the larger and more complex the countries become, that are the subject of the military conflict, the more trouble they create, like the kind of trouble we have in Iraq.

And the final model of course, is the combination approach, where we have diplomacy, trade, selective sanctions, and if not the use of force, at least high political or diplomatic pressure. I think this is the model the US used against the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and which is being used against China. The bottom line in this last approach is that the diplomatic relation is there, and then Washington uses sanctions, trade, and political pressure, or a combination thereof, to change the regimes or their behavior. This last one seems also to have worked quite a bit. Is there another model, or am I right in this classification?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, I mean, you can quibble about the classifications. Certainly there were sanctions in South Africa —

DR. AMIRAHMADI: But with diplomatic relations.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Yes.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So it worked. South Africa was another case, like Eastern Europe, where there existed diplomatic relations, and then Washington and allies used sanctions, and it worked.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Maybe, in a way, you could say that the principal model is a combination, and its different combinations emphasize various aspects of diplomacy. So while your construct is good for analytical purposes, it seems to put a very heavy premium on what I would call a series of steps and measures, which would depend on the urgency of the situation or the intensity of interest both of the United States and of the other country. Such interest might apply, for example, in cases where the other country tended to offer more advantages to the United States in the past, say in Cold War terms, so that the United States might be reluctant to push on questions of international or internal governance. We can see successes and failures along both lines.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Now, let us take the specific

case of Iran. What model, in your view, should be followed there?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, I think there's a combination of efforts. At the moment we're heavily oriented toward sanctions and isolation. That isn't necessarily working, although it seems to have gotten Iranian attention. And because it is unilateral, in some ways it leaves America, at the moment, isolated in its efforts to deal with Iran's nuclear programs, if I can put it that way. The notion that Iran can try to separate Europe from the United States is not absent, at least in American perceptions of Iranian policy.

My own feeling is that some contact is important and significant in beginning to define the future. Countries often feel, after they've tried everything else,

"... it was clear, obvious, and self-evident that we wouldn't have undertaken those kinds of initiatives [Secretary Albright's speech at AIC's March 2000 conference] ... if the objective wasn't to improve relations with Iran, and it's perfectly reasonable to assume that full normalization would have been a goal." — Amb. Pickering

that some kind of cooperation will help to produce a different result one way or another. And when that's likely to happen, you want to have a long series of contacts and understanding, rather than separation. After all, we began speaking with China and Poland in the fifties. It wasn't very fruitful, but it nevertheless contributed to the effort, and when China and the United States made the decision in the early seventies to change their relationship, it was part of the background. I think that a lot of that has to do with the development of clear thinking on the part of both parties, and with the idea that they could make so much more progress, and deal so much more effectively with the issues and problems that divide them, by talking and finding ways to cooperate, than they can by isolation, sanctions, recrimination, and public attack, and a series of actions that make the situation worse rather than better. I think that model, with a heavy emphasis on continuing to try to find ways to bring about change diplomatically, is very important, and probably one that we now ought to try in US-Iranian relations.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: The combination model, if I'm not mistaken, presupposes some kind of a diplomatic relationship.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, if you de-

fine the model that way, of course it does.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: The question I have for you is, in China and in other cases, we broke through this problem. Didn't we start with diplomatic relations? And how did that come about?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, we started with diplomatic contacts. Relations are a formal state which defines the activities officially between the countries. But diplomats aren't confined only to what one would call officially formal contacts. They are allowed to have discussions, consultations, and so on if the governments on both sides are ready to do that before establishing formal diplomatic relations.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So you would propose, if I'm not mistaken, for the combination approach, that probably one of the earliest steps to take is to have officials meet and talk.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I think it's an important factor in making an approach successful that combines many different aspects of moving things ahead. In the last administration we thought it was important, even in the absence of diplomatic relations, to have communication through public media, through exchange of speeches, and through some trade activities, however small, as a way of providing a series of steps that would help open the door.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: This brings me to another important historic issue. During President Clinton's administration, when you were Under Secretary of State, was there any serious intention on the part of the Clinton administration to normalize relations with Iran? Or were they just testing Iran, as opposed to really saying, we have decided to normalize relations with this country, and we are going to get them involved. Was that decision ever made?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I thought it was clear, obvious, and self-evident that we wouldn't have undertaken those kinds of initiatives, very preliminary steps if the objective wasn't to improve relations with Iran, and it's perfectly reasonable to assume that full normalization would have been a goal. Everybody wants to be guarded and careful as you get there. But the notion that we were undertaking those efforts to go to war with Iran, or to make relations worse, or to antagonize Iran, was completely antithetical to the direction in which we were going, or to the major motivating forces. Of course normalization, even as a very distant goal, was very much in the minds of the people who were working on this policy.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So reestablishing diplomatic

ties was indeed a goal in those years.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: It was certainly a goal. It was certainly a part of normalization. It was neither the end point, nor necessarily the full completion of normalization. For example, one can look at the evolution of US-China relations after the early 1970s. Official diplomatic relations took a long time; I think we went from 1972 to 1979. Even so, we had Presidential visits, we had diplomatic missions in each country, we worked on problems together, we agreed to work together. Some problems we couldn't solve, but there was an effort. And the effort led to what clearly has been a normalization of relationships.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: But would you put the responsibility for this missed opportunity squarely on Iran?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I would say that Iranians, in their own defense, have raised some questions, but we also have to understand that Iran has internal politics like the United States has internal politics. So the issue of assigning blame for past mistakes is not a very fruitful enterprise. I think the

issue ought to be to look for opportunities for the future, to see where processes and developments can take things in a more positive direction.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Let me ask a question that I touched on earlier. How would US-Iran policy be different under President Bush in the second term from President Kerry in the first term? What advice would you have for either administration on a more fruitful US policy toward Iran? Should that policy account for the fact that the conservatives in Tehran have sidelined the reformists?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: It is too early to speculate on policies post-election. I have already passed on some thoughts in response to your previous questions. I am concerned that those who favor reform in Iran are now, according to reports here, in the course of being marginalized and the intervention of the anti-reform group in the last election is a worrying part of this.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: And finally, in 1953, the CIA

helped the British to overthrow Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq. Then the US was hostile to Iranian Communists and nationalists. Assuming that Communists are no longer a force to contend with, do you think that the US still considers Iranian nationalists and Social Democrats a threat? More specifically, has the US view of Iranian nationalism and social democracy changed?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: While not accepting all the premises of your questions, I believe the Clinton Administration made clear its views on the Mossadeq issue. I don't know how the present administration sees it. US preoccupations as I understand them are a lot more significant than concerns over Iranian nationalism and social democracy, so long as these ideas are internal to Iran and not for export to the region or beyond.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Thank you, Ambassador Pickering, for a great interview!

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Thank you for asking excellent questions!

Excerpts from President Mohammad Khatami's Press Conference in Tehran on August 28, 2004

(translated and abridged from the original Farsi text, as reported by *Aftab Daily*, Tehran, August 29, 2004, p. 2):

- Secretary Madeleine Albright's acknowledgement of American wrongdoings in Iran [at the March 2000 AIC conference in Washington, DC] provided a good opportunity, but we failed to utilize it to improve relations.

- While Iran will not give up its rights to peaceful use of nuclear technology, it has no intention to develop, and will not develop, the technology for military purposes. If the US has evidence to the contrary, we challenge it to present that evidence. Note that the International Atomic Energy Agency has not said that Iran has taken steps toward developing a bomb.

- A serious threat to world peace is the proliferation of nuclear weapons by countries who are not members of NPT, including Israel. Likewise, India and Pakistan continue to build nuclear bombs without the supervision of international institutions. Iran is for denuclearization of the region.



“The United States expects us to negotiate with it as a convicted party, and accept its agenda for negotiation as well as its pre-conditions. No sovereign nation will do such a thing.” — Pres. Khatami

- The United States does not need to attack Iran; it first needs to finish the job in Iraq! I believe Israel will not attack Iran's nuclear installations either, and they know that we are well prepared to respond.

- Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is for democracy in Iraq, but those who came to Iraq to establish democracy are now repressing people. We are not for tension in Iraq and work toward political stability.

- The United States knows that without the presence and participation of Iran in Iraq and Afghanistan, it cannot bring security and stability to these nations. We have many disputes with the United States, but we will not take our disputes with it to Iraq.

- The United States expects us to negotiate with it as a convicted party, and accept its agenda for negotiation as well as its pre-conditions. No sovereign nation will do such a thing.

Interview with Ambassador Javad Zarif

Continued from previous issue:



DR. AMIRAHMADI: Now, as for the Hezbollah in Lebanon, I understand that when the Israelis were in Lebanon, Hezbollah was fighting them and you considered them as freedom fighters. Now there are no Israelis in Lebanon. Why do you still sup-

port them?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Hezbollah is a political party. It's not a shadowy organization; it is a political party with representation in the Lebanese Parliament. A pragmatic and rational leadership within Hezbollah has pursued policies that are in the national interests of Lebanon. We have had very good relations with the Lebanese government and various political forces in Lebanon, as was clearly manifested by the visit of President Khatami to Lebanon where various Lebanese, not just supporters of Hezbollah, turned out in huge numbers in the streets to welcome the President and to listen to him. This is the type of relationship we have had historically with Lebanon and will continue to have with Lebanon. Hezbollah itself has proved to be a cause for stability. Following Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, if it wasn't for the cooperation that Hezbollah extended to the Lebanese government, you would have had chaos in southern Lebanon, particularly because of the fact that certain elements in south Lebanon had cooperated with Israel. You did not see any revenge in southern Lebanon. And that is, again, important.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: After Israel left Lebanon, has there been any act of violence from Hezbollah against the Israelis?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Well, again, this is for Hezbollah to answer. I know that reports indicate that there have been skirmishes once in every while; there have been problems in the Shaba Farm, which continues to be a contested territory. Hezbollah and the entire Arab world and Islamic world believe that Shaba Farm belongs to Lebanon and has yet to be liberated, and Israel needs to withdraw from that territory. But saving for this, the general conditions have been rather calm.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So Iran's official policy on the issue of the Lebanese Hezbollah and Israel is that the two sides should live in relative peace.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Iran does not need to have an official position on this.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Do you have one?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: We believe that the cause of the problems in the Middle East has been occupation. If anything, Lebanon is a very good proof of that, that an end to occupation ended the most serious problem of security. Security and occupation are contradictions in terms.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: All right. On the occupation issue, I would assume that when you say "occupation" you don't mean the entire Israeli territory. You mean certain territories as opposed to those territories that originally were given to Israel by the United Nations. Is that right?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I'm talking about a state for the Palestinians which will satisfy the Palestinian people and their aspiration for a state.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So you do see some territories called Israel as legitimate?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: The problem is the continued occupation of Palestinian territory. Once that problem is resolved, and how it is resolved depends on the Palestinians and Israelis, then it's a different story. There may be various alternatives to resolving this problem, but none of the alternatives, even those anticipated in different times by different people, suggests deprivation of anybody's legitimate right to self-determination. That would include the self-determination of Jews, Christians, and Moslems living in that particular territory. But that is not up to us to decide. It's up to the people who live in that territory to decide. We can only present our analysis and even venture to provide suggestions of what can be positive, what can be conducive to security and peace.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Two nations, two states. Is that an acceptable solution?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: If it is acceptable to the Palestinian people, we have nothing against it.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: But in the West, in the US, the general impression is that Iran's official policy is working toward the destruction of Israel.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Iran does not officially

recognize Israel. That is not tantamount to taking any action against it. Iran has made it very clear that it does not seek hostility or conflict with anyone. Iran has made that very clear in the most general terms and in the most categorical terms, that we do not seek hostility. At the same time, we have not been shy in stating our position that we do not recognize Israel. That is a policy position that we have adopted. We believe that that position is not incompatible with accepting whatever solution the Palestinians come up with, that is, whatever they decide will be their decision. If it will bring stability and security to the region, then everybody would welcome it.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So, in conclusion, you basically do agree that Israel is going to stay, and there is a part of that territory that is Israeli property.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I agree with what I said, that we do not recognize Israel, but we will accept whatever the Palestinian peoples decide about their own future.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: And your policy is not to destroy the Israeli society.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Our policy is not to destroy any society.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Thank you. Let us now talk about human rights. Again, I know this is probably a little bit further away from what you would have liked to discuss here, but that's an issue that exists in US-Iran relations, and not only in US-Iran, but also in Iran-Europe relations. Indeed, in recent months, there has been further propagation of this issue in US-Iran relations and in Iran-West relations in general. Recall the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize and the UN resolution against Iran. How do you see this issue?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Well, first of all, I do not believe that this is an issue in US-Iran relations. Again, we need to understand the political clichés, the propaganda clichés that have been used, and differentiate them from the real policy. And I think anybody who has studied US behavior not only vis-à-vis Iran but vis-à-vis the region, would come to the conclusion that human rights are not the determining factor in US relations with anybody and have never been.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Hasn't it changed in recent times?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Maybe, but human rights is an Iranian problem. We believe that we need to improve our human rights. This is a national task for us. And it is most effectively handled when it is made a national task. No foreign-sponsored solution is sustainable in a country.

What you need is a sustained culture of human rights, taking root in a country which has been

deprived of that culture for many centuries. And I think that is developing in Iran, and that is an extremely important development, not only for Iran but for the entire region. Governments need to respond to the demands of the population for the rule of law, and for freedoms and rights. And that is what our region needs. Our region needs indigenous, nationally sustainable processes of participation, of respect for universal values of human rights.

I'm not talking about regional values. Values of human rights are universal. But the process of obtaining respect for these rights must be national, indigenous, and nationally sustainable. The fact that Iranian society has become a very active participant in its political life, and would make every government accountable, would make authority accountable, for the exercise of authority, is an extremely significant development. We are the most vocal critics of human rights abuses and excesses in our society, and that is the way it should be. Because, once forces within societies speak out against excesses, that's when you can sustain a culture of human rights and you can prevent those excesses in the long term. You will have shortcomings, you will have ups and downs, you will have failures, but I think the trend in Iran and in the rest of the region will be for greater respect for human rights.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So you are optimistic about human rights in Iran. You are not only optimistic but you are also advocating very strongly that the Iranian people must demand those universal rights from their government.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Well, personally as a human rights lawyer, I have always been an advocate of human rights and I continue to believe that it is the responsibility of every Iranian citizen to take the matters into their own hands and to make sure that the government is accountable. And I think the process has started in Iran, and this is an irreversible process. I think foreign interference can only harm this process. The process can gain momentum, can gain strength and popular support, if it is understood and perceived by the people to be a process of their own. Ownership of the reform process in Iran and elsewhere in the region is absolutely imperative for its long-term evolution. Otherwise it will have a life only as long as the pressure from outside lasts.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So far we have been speaking about the American concerns. Now I think I am going to come to the Iranian concerns. This is very important. But first let me ask you a broader question: why are some Iranians and the government anti-American?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: We are not anti-American. Iranian society is far from being anti-American. Iran finds many things in the US very ac-

ceptable. The fact that the US has gone to Iran with humanitarian assistance indicates that beyond the political gesturing of the US government, there is a degree of compassion and humanity toward Iran, and that is why Iranians are not anti-American.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: How about the government?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: The Iranian government is not anti-American either. But both the people and the government of Iran have a great deal of mistrust in US behavior. They believe that we have been cheated out of the fruits of our cooperation with the US in the past. We have serious mistrust about US intentions and objectives. Compare US dealing with Al-Qaeda and the MEK. When Iranians see this they suspect whether the US intends to respect Iran's national security. The US objectives are suspect for us. And we've been promised, time and again, positive consequences for the actions that we have undertaken, and unfortunately we have seen the exact opposite of those promises materialize. Yet, if you look at various reflections of the public opinion of the Iranian people, you do not see the anti-Americanism that is so rampant in the rest of the region. Instead, you will see a very deep-rooted mistrust of US policies among the Iranian people and government.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Well, is there anything positive that the US has done for the Iranians over the years? I see everything that you say is negative. Anything positive?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: You cannot say in a blanket fashion that everything that the US has done in Iran has been negative, but there are important negative aspects of US behavior. I was the first to admire the humanitarian gesture that has been undertaken by the United States in addressing the human tragedy in Bam.

But when you talk about policies that have been followed, you will find it very difficult to pinpoint a lot of positives, at least in the last three decades, or even five decades, of US behavior vis-à-vis Iran, starting with the overthrow of the legitimate democratic government in Iran and its replacement by a dictatorship in 1953, and then the support for Saddam Hussein. People tend to forget that the current Secretary of Defense, who is now waging a holy war against Saddam Hussein, used to go to Iraq and provide him assurances that his use of weapons of mass destruction against Iran would not undermine US support for Iraq. It's fortunate that those archives have become a matter of public record. When the United States promised that good will begets good will – President Bush made that promise at his inauguration in 1988 – and Iran did its best to get the release of American hostages from Lebanon, everything turned out to be exactly the opposite of what the US

had promised. And when Iran helped in the removal of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan, we were rewarded by becoming a member of the Axis of Evil.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: It was the Karine-A affair that created that problem – fifty tons of armament going to the Palestinian Authority from Tehran.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: No, it wasn't, and the United States knows it, and in a matter of a few days, a policy of cooperation was transformed into a policy of confrontation. And that is why I said, we cannot trust US promises, and injection of a constituency-dominated policy into American behavior at certain times, and this has happened all the time, that when the US was to deliver on its promises, a constituency-driven injunction prevented it from delivering that promise and in fact caused a total reversal in the opposite direction. This is why we cannot trust.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: The Karine-A was a bogus affair? That is what you are saying?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Karine-A continues to be a mystery that happened at an exactly opportune moment for those who wanted to prevent US-Iran engagement.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: But the Iranian government takes no responsibility for it?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: The Iranian government has absolutely and categorically rejected the claim that it had anything to do with it.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Any part of the Iranian government?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Iran rejected the claim, and it asked the United States in writing to provide it with any clue, not even evidence, any clue that would enable us to ascertain how this happened. But the fact that the US has refrained from doing so makes us believe that this was an operation that was conducted exactly with the purpose of preventing the realization of US promises, and in fact, to push US policy in the opposite direction. This has been a fundamental flaw in US policy towards Iran – that US-Iranian relations have been affected, not by the realities of US-Iranian relations, but by extraneous elements that have imposed themselves on the US attitude toward Iran.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So does that make you believe that perhaps in US-Iran relations you should indeed take into account those other elements as well?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Well, for us it is important to understand, and that is why I am saying constituency-driven politics will not resolve the problem. We need to get out of this sort of cage that we have created for ourselves of clichés, and move in the direction of articulating exactly what it is that

we expect and are prepared to do.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: President Bush, following the Bam earthquake tragedy, tried to move beyond just the average support that other countries have provided and tried to send a high-level delegation to Iran. Why was this rejected?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: It wasn't rejected. We thought that conditions were not ripe enough for such a move. We believe that the momentum that has been created by the humanitarian gestures of the US should be moved forward and we should see whether that can be done by any actual change in behavior and in policy.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Did the US actually consult with the Iranian government before it went public with the name of the delegation?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: In fairness, I don't think the United States ever did go public with the name of the delegation. It was the intention, as we were told, of the US government to seek the views of Iran, because this was a rather bold move, to see whether Iran was prepared to accept this delegation, and then to go public with it. Somehow the information was leaked. But I have been assured that it was not the decision of the US government to leak the information.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So the leak came from somewhere else.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Yes, it wasn't an official leak. At least, I was assured that this was not an official leak.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: You said that the condition was not right for this delegation to visit Tehran. Are we talking about the political condition, the earthquake issue, or what?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: As we have said, the general condition in the area was not right. As the two sides have said, we need to keep this in abeyance and see how the situation develops.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Would you say that this could be revived in the near future?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I cannot predict the future, but I can say that this suggestion has been kept in abeyance for us, to see how the situation develops.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Do you see a move of that type as legitimate?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Well, I see the humanitarian gestures that have been adopted by the United States as helpful. They have presented them as humanitarian in nature. Obviously they will have an impact on the easing of the political atmosphere,

which is important, but in order to be able to sustain this, we need a change in the political attitude as well. Now let us see whether the momentum which has been built by this humanitarian gesture, and the fact that Iran accepted this gesture, could be developed further by a real change in policy.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: At the beginning, you listed a few major Iranian concerns toward the US. You said that the US has to stop hostility toward Iran, should recognize Iran's national interests, stop interfering in domestic affairs of the country, and stop activities that would cripple Iran's economy. Basically, to my surprise, the traditional concerns of Iran, like the frozen assets, were not mentioned. Is that a change of heart on the Iran side? These are very general, very broad concerns now that you are raising.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Once we see a readiness on the part of the US to start operationalizing its demands, then Iran would be prepared to operationalize its demands as well, and will determine what actions would be required to satisfy the demands and what actions each side is prepared to undertake. And I think only at that stage we can say what means what. At this stage, we should not take this as an indication of a change of heart in Iran, because "crippling of Iranian economy" can include the fact that the United States continues illegally to freeze Iranian assets in very large sums.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Or sanctions?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Or sanctions, or other issues.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Basically what you are saying is that you define your concern toward the US in some general terms because the US defines its concerns toward Iran in general terms.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Yes.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So you are basically reciprocating generality with generality.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Yes. I think it would not be conducive for one side to start operationalizing its concerns while the other is maintaining a political cliché about its concerns.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Why not define them in more specific terms in a numbered priority list, saying, this is what we want from the US, and in this particular order?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I do not think that public diplomacy is an appropriate avenue for operationalizing diplomatic demands.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: There are two groups in this

country. One group says the real problem is on the US side, that it is the United States that does not want to have a dialogue with Iran or engage Iran. The other group says the exact opposite, that it is the Iranian government that is the source of the problem, that it is not ready to open up, to negotiate, to engage. Which group is right?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I think both of them are right and both of them are wrong. There are elements in Iran and elements in the US which do not want any engagement between the two countries. Certainly there are elements in the US who believe that nothing short of a change of government in Iran can be acceptable. There are even elements here, in the same group, who believe that nothing short of dismemberment of Iran is acceptable. And those are the elements who would respond more to the interests of other countries than to the interests of the United States. They may be interested in tactical engagement, but not in a positive engagement. There are elements in Iran who have the same approach. They are, I think, both here and in Iran in the minority.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: They are in the minority?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: They are in the minority.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: That is, on the Iran side, the elements who are not for US-Iran engagement are in the minority?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: They are in the minority.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: They are not in major decision-making positions?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: No. You see, the elements who believe that under no conditions the present government of Iran and the present government of the United States should have an engagement are a minority in both countries. There are concerns in Iran about the behavior of the United States, whether engaging this government is conducive to promotion of Iran's national interests. And the reason for that is our negative experience in the past. As I said, it is difficult to trust the intentions, the objectives, and the promises of the United States. It is a problem of finding the necessary mechanism of confidence building. I can appreciate if the US government were to have problems of confidence vis-à-vis Iran. From our vantage point, the government of the United States, because of the presence of some powerful elements who believe that nothing short of a regime change or dismemberment of Iran would do the trick, has failed as of yet to articulate a serious policy vis-à-vis Iran, and that is why it cannot take any steps to foster confidence and promote the nec-

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essary conditions for engagement.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: You talk about a minority in Iran. Isn't that minority, indeed, in power? Isn't it this minority who has the control over the policy toward the US?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: No. What I said was, there is a minority that would oppose engagement with the United States under any conditions. There is a general view in Iran that the current policies of the United States are not conducive to engagement. But there is a minority that believes that even if these policies change, and they take the necessary confidence-building measures, then still, for some ideological reasons, you should not engage the United States. I believe they are in an absolute minority.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: The Leader? Ali Khamenei?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Definitely not a part of them.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Not part of them. Well, this is great! Iran has not had a relationship with the United States for almost twenty-five years. Has Iran gained or lost?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I think both Iran and the United States have lost.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Who has lost most?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I think both have lost.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So you consider lack of relations with the US against Iran's national interests, then?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I consider the lack of relations as not serving Iran's national interests per se, but I believe that conditions conducive to promotion of national interests of both countries should prevail in order for relations to be conducive. And I do not see that, still, taking place in Washington.

That is, we need a conducive atmosphere in which dialogue could lead to promotion of national interests. And that would require a readiness on both sides to respect the other side's national security.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: So, to conclude, what you are saying is that it is in the national interest of Iran to have a dialogue with the United States and hopefully normalize this relationship.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Provided that the United States is willing to respect that very national interest. If the US is not willing to take into account Iran's national security considerations, a dialogue at best can be neutral, and at worst can be harmful to our national security interests. However, if there is an indication that the US is prepared to engage Iran while respecting our national security considerations, then a dialogue would be useful and in the national interests of Iran.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Which brings us to the real question. What is it that the US should do to make you believe that now the condition is right and which would make you sit and talk to the US?

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: I believe it would be important to clarify exactly what it is that the two sides want, and it would be also very important, before that, to clarify that it would be the merits of the issues, rather than the politics of the constituencies, that would govern any dialogue between Iran and the US. I hope your readers will see this interview as an early contribution to the process that I hope will take place.

DR. AMIRAHMADI: Mr. Ambassador, I really thank you. I know that it has been a long discussion, and you have been very open, I may say, in discussing your mind, and I do appreciate this.

AMBASSADOR ZARIF: Thank you.

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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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