

Where is Iran—and U.S.-Iran Policy—Headed?

Aug 5, 2002



Brief Analysis

On August 2, 2002, Zalmay Khalilzad addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. Dr. Khalilzad is special presidential envoy to Afghanistan, special assistant to the president, and National Security Council senior director for Southwest Asia, Near East, and North Africa. The following are excerpts from his remarks. [Read a full transcript. \(templateC07.php?CID=168\)](#)

"On January 29, the President in his State of the Union address laid the foundation for the policy we are pursuing today for Iran. It's a dual track policy based on moral clarity: tell the world specifically what is destructive and unacceptable about Iran's behavior -- sponsorship of terror, pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and repression of the clearly expressed desires of the Iranian people for freedom and democracy -- while laying out a positive vision of partnership and support for the Iranian people. This dual track approach reflects two fundamental principles and beliefs of the President more broadly: first, that September 11 taught us that we need to deal with threats before they manifest [themselves], and, second, that there is an essential truth that must be emphasized: when given the choice, people will choose freedom. . . ."

Sympathy with the Iranian People

"Americans sympathize with the clearly expressed desire of the Iranian people to live in a society that is free, open, and prosperous; one in which their government adheres to the rule of law, respects human rights and plays a constructive role in the world. On July 12, President Bush followed through with his support for the Iranian people by endorsing -- again with specificity and moral clarity -- their clearly and repeated[ly] expressed desires for freedom and democracy. He did so at a time when students were commemorating the regime's violent repression of their demonstrations for change and when Nowruz -- Iran's now banned key reformist newspaper -- published an open letter of resignation from a senior cleric, Ayatollah Taheri, condemning the regime for its 'deception, unemployment, inflation, diabolical gap between rich and poor, bribery, cheating, growing drug consumption, incompetence and failure of political structure.'

"We will continue to speak out in support of the Iranian people. It is not only the right thing to do, but also the right time. The Iranian people -- teachers, students, journalists, intellectuals and even members of parliament -- are now pushing for a more open, free, prosperous, independent Iran, which is accountable to its people. U.S. policy is not to impose change on Iran but to support the Iranian people in their quest to decide their own destiny. Our policy is not about Khatami or Khameni, reform or hard line; it is about supporting those who want freedom, human rights, democracy, and economic and educational opportunity for themselves and their fellow countrymen and women. . . . President Khatami has been ineffective in challenging the regime and therefore made only marginal gains. The unelected hardliners have consistently been able to checkmate reformists and maintain hard-line rule. . . ."

"The voices and protests of Iran's young people have been repressed -- at times violently. . . . Iranian writers have tried to establish a more independent and pro-reform media, only to be shut down. . . . Iranian intellectuals and parliamentarians have tried to speak out on issues of concern to them. But many have been arrested, and some have been killed, perhaps in complicity with the unelected elements of the Iranian regime. . . . Iranian professionals and

laborers have also worked and studied hard for a more prosperous, better life, but their economy has been plagued by mismanagement, corruption, and a diversion of resources to support international terrorist groups and pursue weapons of mass destruction. . . .

"I want to emphasize this point: the United States wants to see a democratic and prosperous Iran, integrated into the global economy. However, the policies of the current Iranian regime -- both at home and abroad -- are responsible for the poor state of the country's economy and hostile relations with the United States. . . ."

Iranian Foreign Policy

"After September 11, the American people received many expressions of support from the Iranian people. Our nation was moved by the candlelight vigil held in Tehran in the wake of the attacks. We had hoped that after the . . . attacks, the Iranian regime would end its support for terrorists. Initially, we heard some encouraging words from parts of the Iranian government. . . . But the Iranian government did not stop its support for terror. Hard-line, unaccountable elements in Iran facilitated the movement of al-Qaida terrorists -- escaping from Afghanistan -- perhaps without the knowledge of elected members of government. . . . The Iranian regime also supports Hezbollah -- a terrorist group with global reach -- and other terrorist groups dedicated to violently opposing any peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. . . .

"On Israel, while support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians is understandable, we ask Iranians to ask of themselves, are your interests served by an implacable opposition to the very existence of Israel? In the twenty-first century, should Iran be the only one aside from Saddam Hussein's regime and Palestinian terrorists to demand the destruction of another people? . . .

"The Iranian government is also aggressively pursuing weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and the missiles to deliver them. Although Iran is a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the government is developing the capability to produce chemical weapons; for example, it has manufactured and stockpiled blister, blood and choking agents and grown its pesticide production capability. . . . It is a particularly dangerous prospect for a regime -- not accountable to the Iranian people and supporting terrorists -- to acquire nuclear weapons. . . . In Iran, critical decisions on national security issues are made by an unelected few who have used terrorism as an instrument of policy -- against other countries and against Iran's own citizens. . . . These unelected few have also stood in the way of an authoritative dialogue with the United States.

"Iran's record on Afghanistan is mixed. It opposed the Taliban and played a positive role in the discussions in Bonn which led to the establishment of the Afghan Interim Authority. . . . But the regime has sent some Quds forces associated with its Revolutionary Guards to parts of Afghanistan. Iranian officials have provided support to regional parties without the knowledge and consent of the Afghan Interim Authority. Why are they doing this? Elements in Iran feel threatened by the emergence of a moderate and Western-oriented Afghanistan. . . . There are many reasons why Iran should have an interest in a stable Afghanistan. A stable Afghanistan should be a shared U.S.-Iranian interest.

"However, at this point our common interests are clouded by . . . Iranian intellectuals' failure -- so far -- to make the fundamental strategic decision to make combating terrorism a priority. Terrorist networks of global reach have created a fundamental fault line in international relations. The vast majority of the world now sees itself standing on the same side of a great divide. It is time for Iran to give up terror as [an] instrument of policy. . . ."

Conclusion

"Iran is an ancient land, home to a proud culture with a rich heritage of learning and progress. We believe that the Iranian people have the ability to make great contributions in this new era, and that the future of Iran will be decided by the people of Iran. And 'as the Iranian people move towards a future defined by greater freedom, greater

tolerance,' as President Bush said on July 12, 'they will have no greater friend than the United States of America.'"

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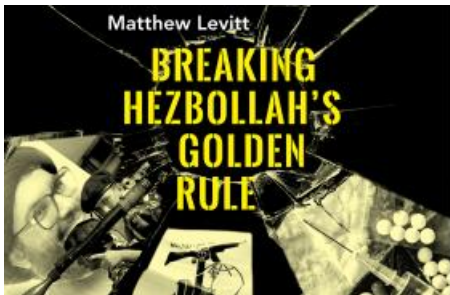
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