



British Parliamentary Committee for Iran Freedom



POLICY PAPER

'IRAQ, IRAN & THE WIDER MIDDLE EAST'

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Executive Summary

It has been suggested that Iran and Syria should become partners to help resolve the problems in Iraq as its elected government tries to build stability and security. But both those countries are part of the problem in Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere. The better suggestion is to talk to those who can help to solve the problem, the Iranian Resistance.

Prime Minister Blair said in his annual foreign policy speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet in London in November that: *"...[Iran] help the most extreme elements of Hamas in Palestine; Hizbollah in the Lebanon; Shia militia in Iraq. That way, they put obstacles in the path to peace, paint us, as they did over the Israel/Lebanon conflict, as the aggressors, inflame the Arab street and create political turmoil in our democratic politics. It is a perfectly straightforward and clear strategy. It will only be defeated by an equally clear one: to relieve these pressure points one by one and then, from a position of strength to talk, in a way I described in July in my speech in Los Angeles: offer Iran a clear strategic choice: they help the MEPP not hinder it; they stop supporting terrorism in Lebanon or Iraq; and they abide by, not flout, their international obligations. In that case, a new partnership is possible. Or alternatively they face the consequences of not doing so: isolation."*

Iran is one of the major foreign policy issues facing the international community. The prospect of 'the world's most active state sponsor of terrorism', armed with nuclear weapons is sobering.

As important as the nuclear issue is the strong interference of Iran in the internal affairs of Iraq. The outcome of conflict in Iraq will have major implications for the Middle East. The prospect of Iraq ruled by a theocratic system is a major concern. This is the aim of Iran's interference.

A related issue is the role of Iran's regime as the source of spiritual guidance for Islamic fundamentalists around the world. Officials have for long publicly called Iran "the mother of the Islamic world" and the Supreme Leader considers himself to be God's representative on earth.

Islamic fundamentalism represents a serious and immediate challenge to the international community. Most, if not all, major terrorist attacks over the past two decades have been carried out by Islamic fundamentalist groups.

Against this background and the rise to power of the most radical faction of the Iranian regime, the question is: what is the most effective policy towards Iran and to improve security and stability in Iraq and the wider Middle East?

While recognising the interests of Iraq's neighbours in a peaceful and stable Iraq, Iran's record of military interference and its agenda for that country means this idea is ill-conceived and a recipe for disaster.

Tehran has its own agenda for Iraq, which is significantly in conflict with that of most Iraqis and the international community.

Iran's meddling has caused serious concern among the Iraqi people. Secular politicians, Sunnis and many Shiites have expressed their concern about this blatant interference and some 5.2 million Iraqis signed a declaration calling for the eviction of Iran's agents from Iraq. It said: *"...the main dispute [in Iraq] is between democracy and dictatorship. The first and most important political alignment in Iraq is between democratic and patriotic forces with their various inclinations and thoughts on the one hand and affiliates of the Iranian regime on the other..."*

An anti-fundamentalist alliance has already been formed by Iraqi politicians, including Dr. Adnan Mohammed Salmani Al-Dulaimi, President of the Iraqi Accord Front, and Dr. Saleh Mohammed Al-Motlak, Secretary General of the Iraq Front for National Dialogue. The Iranian opposition movement, the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran, currently based in Iraq, has played a significant role in encouraging Iraqis to participate in the political process and acted as a bulwark to the spread of Islamic fundamentalism from Iran.

Offering Iran any form of partnership would alienate the Iraqi secular forces particularly Sunnis, who are vital allies in efforts to achieve stability and security. It would also push them away from

the political process. The British Parliamentary Committee for Iran Freedom believes that Iran is not part of the solution to the problems in Iraq; rather it is a major part of the problem.

Iran has gained political support among Arabs and Muslims for rhetoric in support of Palestinians, confrontation with Israel and their role in the conflict in Lebanon. Yet the majority of Muslims and Arabs, including a majority of Iraqis, resent Tehran's meddling and its efforts to turn Iraq into their sphere of influence. Tehran cannot claim that the money and arms it is sending to its proxy militias and terrorist groups in Iraq are for the cause of fighting "Zionism and the global oppression", which is what it claims to do in Lebanon and Palestine.

Standing with the anti-Iranian front in Iraq, it is possible to broaden its appeal. Political forces that were extremely hostile to the United States and called for an immediate US withdrawal, are now saying that the threat Iran poses is greater than that from the US. They have changed their position and are now saying that US forces must not leave Iraq before there is an end to Iran's "hidden occupation".

Without confronting Iran, Islamic fundamentalism will continue to spread across the region. But if the West adopts the right policy, Iraq can turn into the main strength of the front against Islamic radicalism and the Achilles heel of the Iranian regime.

Introduction

The security situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate. As the death toll of US and British servicemen and women increase and more than 100 Iraqis are killed every day, western leaders in general, but in particular those of the United States and Britain are searching for a new policy for Iraq and the wider Middle East.

Former US Secretary of State, James Baker, has said that ‘staying the course’ is not the only policy option available in respect of Iraq and that an immediate withdrawal from Iraq would lead to “*the biggest civil war you have ever seen*”.¹ However, everything in between is being considered. One of those policy options is engaging with Iran and Syria.

The ‘engagement’ camp portrays this policy as a grand new idea, but it has significant detractors, not least because of Tehran’s destabilising role in Iraq. In considering policy options, proper thought should be given to the regimes involved, their ideology and objectives, as well as the wider implications for the countries involved and the region. A broad brush approach concentrating on one specific matter, without proper thought to the wider implications, will result in a repeat of the mistakes already made.

This policy paper will concentrate on the role played by the Iranian regime in Iraq, the wider Middle East and on the international stage to determine the consequences of continued engagement with Iran, including those that affect the situation inside Iran, Iraq, the wider Middle East and ultimately the security and stability of the world.

The Iranian regime

Ideology

The roots of Islamic fundamentalism go back to the first centuries of Islam. But Islamic fundamentalism in its current context, theory, and power emerged after Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in Iran in 1979. Khomeini’s regime transformed the idea of creating a global

¹ ‘Baker says no magic bullet for Iraq problems’, Reuters, 17 October 2006

Islamic rule from an unachievable ideal to an achievable goal by many fundamentalist groups, and gave these groups global backing.

Khomeini institutionalised the "*export of revolution*" and creation of a global Islamic rule, as a specific goal and programme within various parts of his constitution. The foreword of the regime's constitution reads, in part: "*Given the context of Iran's Islamic Revolution, which was a movement for the victory of all the oppressed over the oppressors, it provides the ground for continuation of the revolution inside and outside the country, specifically in spreading international links to other Islamic and people's movements, tries to pave the way for the creation of unique global ummah so the continuation of the struggle for the salvation of deprived and suffering nations can be settled.*" Another part of the foreword, under the headline "*Ideological Army*" reads: "*The Army of the Islamic Republic and the Revolutionary Guards Corps. . . carry not only the duty of protecting the borders but also ideological duty, i.e., Jihad for God and struggle to spread the rule of God's law in the world.*"

The nature of the mullahs' expansionist ideology is clear from their motto of conquering Jerusalem via Karbala. As will be seen, the main tool used in pursuit of this expansionist ideology has been terrorism. Islamic fundamentalist sponsored terrorism now represents the greatest threat to peace and stability around the world.

A New Era

Islamic fundamentalist ideology pervades the Iranian regime and the war in Iraq has emboldened Tehran in the pursuit of its expansionist agenda. It has gifted the mullahs their first stop, Karbala, on their journey to conquer Jerusalem.

Although neither free nor fair, the June 2005 presidential 'election' in Iran was significant, because the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) took steps to guarantee an Ahmadinejad victory. The IRGC's vote rigging and fraud was so extensive that even pillars of the regime, such as former President Rafsanjani, publicly complained.²

² 'Iran poll challenger accused of ballot fraud', The Guardian, 20 June 2005

By propelling Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to victory, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, completed his absolute control over the executive, the judiciary and legislature. This strategic decision marked a new era in Iran's political landscape. In the past 18 years, since Khomeini's death, the regime has been operating with two factions (i.e. 'hardliners' and 'moderates') sharing power. The dominant view in the West was that the moderate faction was gradually gaining ground and it was only a matter of time before the hardliners would be pushed aside. Ahmadinejad's ascension undercut that view, lifted the veil of moderation and showed the ruling theocracy's true colours.

A "Boston Globe" editorial had this to say about the matter:

*"The election of Iran's new president, Tehran's Mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, delivers to the reactionary forces around Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei the last power node that had been in the hands of reformists. Now that reformists have been excised from the Parliament, city councils, and the presidency, there is no longer any institutional opposition to Khamenei and his loyalists."*³

Ahadinejad's Presidency was bound to have major internal and foreign policy implications. After his presidency he declared: *"Thanks to the blood of the martyrs, a new Islamic revolution has arisen and the Islamic revolution of 1384 will, God willing, cut off the roots of injustice in the world."* He added, *"The wave of the Islamic revolution will soon reach the entire world."* A week later, suicide bombers carried out attacks across the London underground train network and on a bus, leaving more than 50 dead and hundreds wounded.

As soon as he was elected and even before taking office, the Iranian regime's attitude on various issues began to change. Ahmadinejad's election settled Iran's internal power struggle in favour of the most radical faction within the clerical regime. Since then, the regime has continued to advance its goals by tapping into the short term economic interests of certain countries and taking advantage of the lack of will and division among Western allies.

³ 'Iran's harder line', Boston Globe, 29 June 2005

Meddling In Iraq

A clear example of the Iranian regime's attempts to export Islamic fundamentalism can be seen from its interference in the internal affairs of Iraq. For Iran, Iraq is a strategic spring board for the export of fundamentalism. Iraq is the only other Muslim country with a majority Shiite population and hosts some of Shiite Islam's most holy sites. Historically, the religious seminary in Najaf has been influenced by Iranian scholars. Even Iraq's most prominent cleric, Ayatollah Sistani, is Iranian.

Ayatollah Khomeini lived in Iraq for 15 years. After coming to power in Iran he unsuccessfully called on the Iraqi people to rise up against Saddam Hussein. In the early 1980s, Khomeini founded the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). The military section of SCIRI, the Badr Corp, was for 15 years part of the IRGC. The Badr Corps is one two Shiite militia, with the Mahdi Army, which are responsible for widespread bloodshed in Iraq.

From the time of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian regime had set up special sections both in the Ministry of Intelligence & Security (MOIS) and the IRGC responsible for affairs in Iraq. After the collapse of the previous Iraqi regime in the spring of 2003, Iran was ready to take advantage of the situation. It dispatched thousands of armed operatives to Iraq and set up extensive clandestine intelligence and terrorist networks in the country. Just one month after the end of hostilities in Iraq, then-US civil administrator, Paul Bremer, expressed concern about Iranian interference in Iraq.⁴

In a report issued on 3 July 2004, relating to the Iranian regime's interference in Iraq, the "New York Times" quoted "*Western and Iraqi officials*" as saying that "*Iran has moved into its best position in decades to influence the political shape of Iraq.*"

Iran is also widely believed to be responsible for a large proportion of the terrorist attacks that take place in Iraq. In January 2005, the Iraqi Defence Minister, Hazem al-Shaalán, warned the

⁴ Interview with ABC news, 28 May 2003

Iranian regime over its support for insurgents in Iraq and accused it of being mainly responsible for the deteriorating situation in Iraq.⁵

In an article drawing attention to assassinations of dissidents in Iraq, “Newsday” wrote:

*“Most troubling for U.S. policy in the Middle East is that many Iraqis believe the police who commit these killings are working ultimately for Iran, where most of them lived for many years in exile from Saddam Hussein. Sources with access to U.S. intelligence confirm that Shia Iran has infiltrated large numbers of agents into both police, security and Interior Ministry paramilitary forces.”*⁶

Iran’s campaign of eliminating Iraqi dissidents opposed to its interference in Iraq continues. In the past couple of months alone, well known Iraqi dissidents who have been murdered include, Abdul-Rahim Nasrallah⁷, the leader of the National Justice and Progress Party, Ayatollah Mohammad Moussawi Qasemi, a prominent Shiite cleric and Secretary General of the Islamic Unity Party in Iraq, and Mohammad Qassem Ahmad al-Bayati, the governor of the northern town of Soleiman-bak.

Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad recently told AFP: *“There is another challenge facing Iraqis: preventing regional powers who want Iraq to fail. Two countries are particularly playing a negative role: the Iranian and Syrian regimes. These regimes are supporting groups who are killing Iraqis. Their objective is to use Iraqis as cannon fodder in their plan to keep Iraqis divided and Iraq weak. Iraqis must unite against their enemies and against sectarianism and the killing of the innocent.”*⁸

There is extensive evidence that Iran has been providing insurgents with all sorts of weaponry, including improvised explosive devices, believed to be responsible for the deaths of US and British soldiers in Iraq. The “Sunday Telegraph” reported that three factories in Iran were mass-

⁵ ‘Iraqi Defence Minister says Iran mainly to blame for Iraq unrest: report’, AFP, 5 January 2005

⁶ ‘Assassinations, Iranian connection spread fear in Iraq’, Newsday, 27 August 2005’

⁷ ‘11 dead in Baghdad TV station attack’, The Guardian, 12 October 2006

⁸ ‘US ambassador says Syria and Iran back Iraq rebels’, AFP, 12 October 2006

producing the sophisticated roadside bombs.⁹ More recently, The “Daily Telegraph” reported senior British military officials as saying that Iran is sustaining the insurgency against British and American forces by supplying terrorists with weapons and cash. It reported military sources as disclosing that there is “*very, very strong intelligence*” that elements inside Iran have continued to fund and support the gun-running. Lt Col Simon Browne, commanding officer of 2 Bn The Royal Anglians, told the newspaper: “*I’m sure there is outside influence here and it is from Iran. It is clear the insurgents are getting resupply from somewhere. I would believe it comes from Iran, or at least comes from Iranian sources.*”¹⁰

On 12 November 2006, the lethality of these weapons were again proven, when a British patrol boat was attacked near Basra using improvised explosive devices, leaving four British servicemen and women dead and three seriously injured.

Meddling in the wider Middle East

Iran has for long been meddling in the internal affairs of other countries in the Middle East. In particular, Tehran has actively opposed any peace between Israel and Palestine and sought to destabilise Lebanon’s fragile democracy.

In his foreign policy speech to the Lord Mayor’s Banquet in London, Prime Minister Blair said, “*What is happening in the Middle East today is not complex. It is simple. Iran is being confronted over its nuclear weapons ambitions... The statements of its President - such as wiping Israel from the face of the earth - are causing alarm, even in Iran...But we all want Iran to suspend its enrichment process which if allowed to continue, will give them a nuclear weapon...But Iran is refusing to do it. Instead they are using the pressure points in the region to thwart us. So they help the most extreme elements of Hamas in Palestine; Hizbollah in the Lebanon; Shia militia in Iraq. That way, they put obstacles in the path to peace, paint us, as they did over the Israel/Lebanon conflict, as the aggressors, inflame the Arab street and create political turmoil in our democratic politics.*”

⁹ ‘Three Iranian factories ‘mass-produce’ bombs to kill British in Iraq’, The Sunday Telegraph, 20 August 2006

¹⁰ ‘Iraqi terrorists ‘are being supplied with arms smuggled from Iran’, The Daily Telegraph, 11 November 2006

Iran's role in supplying missiles to Hezbollah and instigating the recent conflict in Lebanon was a reminder to the international community of the lengths to which it will go to foment unrest in the region. On 11 July 2006, the day before Hezbollah launched missiles at Israel and abducted two Israeli soldiers, Iran's nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, met EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana in Brussels and told him that Iran would not meet EU demands to suspend its uranium enrichment programme. On his way back to Iran, Larijani stopped off in Damascus and met senior Hezbollah leaders and other supporters of the Iranian regime. That same evening, Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. More recently, the US has accused Iran and Syria, through Hezbollah, of trying to topple the secular government of Lebanon.¹¹

Terrorism and Export of Islamic Fundamentalism

Iran continues to be recognised by the US annual report on terrorism as *“the most active state sponsoring terrorism.”* Governments in Europe and elsewhere share this view. Prime Minister Blair told the Liaison Committee of the Parliament on 18 November 2005: *“If Iran was to develop nuclear weapons capability then I think it would pose a very serious threat to world stability and peace.”* He added: *“There are three issues that worry people: there is their nuclear weapons capability and their refusal to co-operate properly with the Atomic Energy Authority; there is their support of terrorism around the Middle East and there is their meddling in Iraq. On each of those three issues we have real genuine cause for concern.”*

In London on 23 March 2006, the Prime Minister described Iran as meddling *“furiously”* in Iraq and said that the ruling theocracy had a terrorist *“ideology”* at its heart. He stated: *“The conventional view is that, for example, Iran is hostile to al-Qaeda and therefore would never support its activities. But as we know from our own history of conflict, under the pressure of battle, alliances shift and change. Fundamentally, for this ideology, we are the enemy...The different aspects of this terrorism are linked. The struggle against terrorism in Madrid or London or Paris is the same as the struggle against the terrorist acts of Hezbollah in Lebanon or the PIJ in Palestine or rejectionist groups in Iraq. The murder of the innocent in Beslan is part of the same ideology that takes innocent lives in Saudi Arabia, the Yemen or Libya...And when Iran gives support to such terrorism, it becomes part of the same battle with the same ideology at its*

¹¹ White House: Syria, Iran Target Lebanon, Washington Post, 1 November 2006

heart... Why is it so important to the forces of reaction and violence to halt Iraq in its democratic tracks and tip it into sectarian war? Why does Iran meddle so furiously in the stability of Iraq? The answer is that the reactionary elements know the importance of victory or defeat in Iraq”.

Terrorism is closely linked to Iran’s efforts to spread its brand of Islamic fundamentalism to the rest of the Middle East. As Ahmadinejad stated after his election victory, he hopes the wave of Islamic revolution would soon reach the whole world. Iran was home to the first Islamic fundamentalist regime in the world and its clerical rulers use the powers, resources and facilities of a state to achieve their regional and global expansionist ambitions. Regardless of differences among fundamentalist groups, so long as the regime remains in power, Tehran continues to act as the heartland of the extremist Islamic fundamentalist movement around the world.

For many years, the Iranian opposition had warned of the dangers posed by Islamic fundamentalism and the threats emanating from it. In the early 1990s, Mrs Maryam Rajavi, President-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), and the Iranian Resistance warned that in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islamic fundamentalism would become a global phenomenon and would resort increasingly to terrorism as Iran’s mullahs attempt to export their “*Islamic revolution*” to other Muslim countries.¹²

The international community ignored the rising threat of Islamic fundamentalism and tried to placate or appease this emerging threat. Events over the past five years have highlighted the intensifying threat that the world faces from the scourge of Islamic fundamentalism, with the horrific bombings in Madrid and London bringing the threat much closer to home.

Iran’s terrorist campaign spans continents and has resulted in thousands of deaths. To serve as a reminder, on 9 November 2006, Argentine Federal Judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corral ordered an international warrant for the arrest of former Iranian President Rafsanjani and eight other senior Iranian officials on charges of masterminding the July 1994 suicide bombing of a Jewish cultural centre in Buenos Aires. Eighty-five people were killed and 151 were injured in the worst terrorist

¹² ‘Islamic Fundamentalism: The New Global Threat’, Mohammad Mohaddessin, Seven Locks Press, 1993

attack ever on Argentine soil.¹³ The US, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Turkey are amongst the many other countries who have issued arrest warrants for senior Iranian officials.

Suicide attacks incited by Islamic fundamentalist ideology are a hallmark of Iran's terrorism. One of the earliest and largest ever suicide bomb attacks carried out by agents of the Iranian regime was on the US Marine Headquarters in the Lebanon in 1983, which killed over 250 US marines. More recently, shortly after the beginning of the recent war in Iraq, a leading Iranian cleric and head of the Guardian Council, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, urged Iraqis to use suicide attacks to expel US forces from Iraq and learn from Iran's Islamic revolution to set up a new government.¹⁴ The IRGC has also set up a 'Lovers of Martyrdom' garrison, for the training of suicide bombers for operations against Islam's foes.

Nuclear Programme

Iran's nuclear programme is currently one of the most pressing issues for the international community. Iran has made it clear that it will pursue its nuclear programme no matter what the consequences. It has defied the IAEA and has failed to comply with UN Security Council resolution 1696 calling on it to halt its uranium enrichment by 31 August 2006. The regime claims that its nuclear projects are for civilian purposes. However, this does not tally with its 18 years of deception and concealment of its nuclear programmes.¹⁵ Until August 2002, when the Iranian opposition movement, NCRI, revealed the secret uranium enrichment site of the regime in Natanz, part of which was built under ground, the Iranian regime was vehemently denying being involved in such projects. The NCRI also revealed a heavy water plant at Arak used for the production of plutonium. Reuters' report on these revelations said the following:

"New satellite images show a heavy water plant in Iran, intended to supply a research reactor that could eventually produce plutonium for one atomic bomb a year, is nearly complete, the Institute for Science and International Security said. Western diplomats close to the U.N. nuclear watchdog said Iran had already laid the foundations for the 40-megawatt heavy-water research

¹³ 'Argentina order for Rafsanjani arrest 'baseless:' Iran', AFP, 11 November 2006

¹⁴ 'Iran Cleric Urges Iraqi Suicide Attacks', Associated Press, 3 May 2003

¹⁵ '18 years of lies from Iran over its nuclear plans', The Daily Telegraph, 12 November 2003

*reactor at Arak, despite calls by the European Union and the United Nations to scrap the project. The Arak heavy-water production plant, along with the Natanz uranium enrichment plant, was revealed by the NCRI in August 2002.”*¹⁶

There is little doubt that Iran is pursuing a nuclear programme for military purposes. The head of the IRGC, Major General Rahim Safavi, is reported as having said: “*Technology is a vital factor for political regimes in defending themselves. Technological superiority has been and will continue to be the strategic cornerstone for the defence of nations*” adding that nuclear technology was inseparable from “*defence and national security.*”¹⁷

The experience of the past four years has shown that Iran has been ‘playing the international community for fools’. It has breached agreements reached with the ‘EU-3’ in November 2003 and then again in November 2004 – including with the breaking of U.N. seals and the resumption of work at its nuclear facility in Isfahan and starting uranium enrichment. Since 2003, Iran has ignored at least 14 ultimatums by the international community.

Iran’s nuclear policy during its negotiations with the EU was well explained by Iran's then top nuclear negotiator, Hassan Rowhani, who told the leading Iranian daily ‘Kayhan’ that Tehran had benefited greatly from the talks with the EU-3 in advancing its nuclear programme. He said:

“In the past 21 months, the Islamic Republic has achieved brilliant results in technical, legal, political, propaganda and national security spheres. At the start of the negotiations, we had elementary success with respect to technology, that is, we had succeeded in enrichment at the laboratory level. In Arak, we had just begun. In Isfahan, we had not yet produced any UF4 or UF6. In fact, the Isfahan project did not even exist and we had a very limited number of centrifuges. Today, however, we have started up, tested the facility in Isfahan at the industrial level, and produced several tons of UF6. Today, there are a significant number of manufactured centrifuges ready for use. It may seem on the surface that we have accepted the suspension. But in reality, we have used the time to alleviate many of our shortcomings. We continued building centrifuges until the Paris Accord. After June, we doubled our efforts to make up for the

¹⁶ Reuters, 4 March 2005

¹⁷ ‘Iran Revolutionary Guards Chief: nuclear capability ensures our survival’, Iran Focus website, 12 August 2005

*suspension. We have not suspended work in Isfahan, even for a second. Arak has not been suspended at any time.”*¹⁸

On 11 April 2006, in defiance of the international community, President Ahmadinejad announced that Iran had joined the nuclear club by enriching uranium to the level required to make nuclear fuel. Moreover, Iran announced the running of its second cascade of 164 centrifuges and President Ahmadinejad has spoken of plans to install 3,000 centrifuges by March 2007 and his ultimate ambition was to have 60,000 centrifuges.¹⁹ On 16 November 2006, Ahmadinejad told the Islamic Republic News Agency that his country would soon take the "final step" in its nuclear programme, without saying what that would involve.

On 14 November 2006, U.N. inspectors reported finding traces of plutonium at an Iranian nuclear waste site. Reuters reported an IAEA report as saying that the U.N. watchdog still could not confirm Iran's nuclear intentions were entirely peaceful given its continued stonewalling of IAEA inquiries dating to 2003.²⁰

In such circumstances, any suggestion or indication that the international community should or might recognise the right of the Iranian regime to nuclear technology, including the nuclear fuel cycle, is a recipe for disaster. Portraying Iran's nuclear programme as a national issue, supported by the majority of Iranian people, is a distorted presentation of reality. As was pointed out by an Iranian scientist, it does not make commercial sense for Iran to pursue such an expensive programme. This is especially so when such a large proportion of Iranians live below the poverty line. There are also Iranians who reject the notion that the nuclear issue is a matter of national pride. On the contrary, they argue that anything that assists the Iranian regime to remain in power is against the interests of the people.

Is 'engagement' with Tehran new?

The 'engagement' camp portrays the policy of engagement with Iran as a grand new idea, but it sounds very much like a well-trodden, fruitless and dangerous path. It began with the carefully

¹⁸ Interview with the daily Kayhan, 23 July 2005

¹⁹ 'Iran soon to take "final step" in atomic plan-IRNA', Reuters, 16 November 2006

²⁰ 'Iran pressing ahead with enrichment – IAEA', AFP, 14 November 2006

choreographed public relations campaign by former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami who duped the international community into believing there was such a thing as a moderate mullah. The proponents of engagement hoped that by providing the Tehran regime with concessions and offering it incentives, they would empower the so-called ‘moderates’. Over the past decade, Iran has been offered everything from trade and cooperation agreements to assistance with a solely civilian nuclear programme. At the same time, western governments acceded to Tehran's demand to blacklist its main opponents, the People’s Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI).

Rather than strengthening the so-called ‘reformers’ and the reform process in Iran, this policy has resulted in the hardliners, led by former Revolutionary Guards commander, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, taking full control. Engagement was never going to work, because it relies on two fundamental misconceptions – the willingness of the mullahs to moderate and be persuaded to abandon their nuclear programmes.

With the introduction of Ahmadinejad and the appointment of his hard-line cabinet, the regime has proved that it is not capable of change, nor is it willing to change. The make up of the new purged regime should act as a wake-up call for the international community, which must give careful consideration to its role in bringing about these troubling developments in Iran. An issue of major concern for Europe and the West must be that all of these dangerous developments have taken place during the period of their policy of ‘constructive engagement’. Serious consideration must be given to the role that the policy of ‘constructive engagement’, adopted by the EU, has played in the unfolding of these troubling events. The same can be said for the US, and in particular the Clinton administration, when it was making overtures to Khatami.

There can be no doubt that this policy has failed.

The question remains: how to deal with the threat posed by Iran and improve security and stability in Iraq and the wider Middle East.

Role of the opposition in ‘the Iran Equation’

The solution to defeating Islamic fundamentalism is to strengthen and support those Muslims who represent an Islam that is the antithesis to Iran’s brand of Islamic fundamentalism - those who will act as a barrier against the spread of fundamentalism.

Little attention has so far been paid to the possible role that the Iranian opposition movement might play and the impact of their actions on Iran, Iraq and the wider Middle East. The focal point of the argument appears to be whether there is a viable alternative to the Iranian regime and whether they can bring about change in Iran. Some argue that there is no strong Iranian opposition movement and that in any event they have little, if any, support in Iran. The British Parliamentary Committee for Iran Freedom does not subscribe to such views. One only has to look back at events prior to the fall of the Shah of Iran. At that time, overt opposition presence was severely limited by oppression. Those opposition groups that existed had most of their leadership and members imprisoned and others such as Ayatollah Khomeini were in exile. But the deep popular discontent was there. Thus, as soon as there was a crack in the spell of repression, the world was shocked by the extent of the Iranian people’s opposition to the shah’s regime.

The NCRI, with the PMOI as its pivotal force, is by far the largest and most organised opposition. Like any other political organisation, the NCRI and the PMOI, also known as the MeK, have their supporters and their detractors, both within Iran and the West.

However, it is accepted that the NCRI and the PMOI have been the primary source of information on the regime’s human rights abuses, terrorism, its nuclear activities and interference in Iraq. By way of example, their assistance in the investigations into the bombing of the Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires in 1994 was recognised by the Chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere of the US Congress. In a letter to the US representative of the NCRI, Elton Gallegly stated:

“I am writing to thank you for the information you contributed regarding the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community centre in Argentina... I have forwarded the materials on the Buenos Aires

*bombing to the United States Department of State. We have since been informed by the State Department that they were able to verify some of the information, and that it proved very helpful in the course of their investigations. Subsequently, a bipartisan staff delegation from the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, which I chair, travelled to Argentina to meet Judge Juan Jose Galeano, who has been investigating the case. The information also proved to be helpful for the Judge. I would like to thank you and the People's Mojahedin of Iran, which put the lives of their members as well as their resources at risk in order to gather this valuable information... Your contribution was important, as it has been most useful in combating terrorism.”*²¹

Regardless of any divergence in views or criticism of the movement, in considering ‘the Iran equation’, the NCRI and PMOI cannot be ignored. A comprehensive analysis of policy towards Iraq, Iran and the wider Middle East requires an analysis of the main players. While the NCRI is the political alternative to the Iranian regime, in this paper we focus on the role of the PMOI. In this context, the PMOI must be considered to be a player, if not the decisive player, especially as the organisation is based in Ashraf City, Iraq.

The PMOI has a 40-year history of struggling against dictatorship in Iran, for which it has paid a heavy price, with the imprisonment, torture and execution of hundreds of thousands of its members and supporters. It is also noticeable that despite having gone through enormous challenges, from the bloody suppression of the Iranian regime, the misinformation campaign against it, designation as a terrorist organisation and the bombing of its bases in Iraq, the PMOI has emerged as an organisation that is now better understood in the West and has in fact stepped up its political activities against the Iranian regime. This is an indicator of the PMOI's deep routes within Iranian society.

During the recent war in Iraq, by (i) declaring their neutrality well before the war, (ii) not defending themselves even when coming under attack by Coalition forces, and (iii) cooperating with the Coalition and voluntarily agreeing to disarm, the PMOI have proved their credentials as an independent political organisation whose only aim is to bring freedom and democracy to Iran and which does not interfere in the affairs of any other nation.

²¹ Letter from Elton Gallegly to Ms Soona Samsami dated 24 September 1998

The PMOI's democratic and tolerant interpretation of Islam places the organisation in a unique position. While fully in accordance with the Iranian people's culture, it endorses complete freedom of belief, expression and the press, and recognises free and fair elections as the basis for legitimacy of any government. It is committed to all the rights and freedoms stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and states that its vision is a secular republic in which there is a separation of church and state, and in which the rights of all citizens are safeguarded regardless of their gender, ethnic background, religious or political beliefs. In fact, women play a significant role in the organisation. It is these beliefs that attracted the masses to the PMOI after the revolution.

Its progressive and democratic interpretation of Islam, and its belief in secularism, means that the PMOI is seen as the antithesis to the regime's brand of Islamic fundamentalism and a barrier to its spread. This was a fact recognised by 5.2 million Iraqis who signed a petition in June of this year warning of the dangers posed by the Iranian regime in Iraq and affirming their support for the PMOI. The signatories stated, *"Iran's rulers want to dominate this part of the world and have turned Iraq into a hunting ground and the frontline of their war with the international community in a bid to curb the struggle for democracy against dictatorship in this country before it reaches Iran...The Iranian regime prevents the establishment of security, stability and democracy in Iraq and poses an immediate threat to our country's integrity and liberty. It is the main obstacle to our independence and the quick departure of the Multi-National Force. Presently, the main dispute is between democracy and dictatorship. The first and most important political alignment in Iraq is between democratic and patriotic forces with their various inclinations and thoughts on the one hand and affiliates of the Iranian regime on the other... The solution and the only encouraging prospect for neutralizing these threats come through eviction of the Iranian regime from Iraq and recognition of the status of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran which is the principle bulwark against the Iranian regime's interventions."*

The 5.2 million signatories represented 121 political parties and social groups, 700,000 women, 14,000 lawyers and jurists, 19,000 physicians, 35,000 engineers, 320 clerics, 540 professors, 2,000 tribal sheikhs and 300 local officials. This is a forceful and persuasive view that cannot be

ignored. The PMOI's constructive role in Iraq has also been recognised by the Coalition which has confirmed publicly the PMOI's contribution to the establishment of security in Iraq.

The NCRI and PMOI also claim widespread international support for their aims and objectives. Many in the US Congress, as well as majorities in the Parliaments of Britain,²² Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, Norway, the European Parliament, as well as many Danish, French, German, Dutch and Swiss members of Parliament have declared their support for the organisation.²³

Policy options

Iran is one of the most challenging foreign policy issues facing the international community and the way that it is dealt with has a direct impact on Iraq and the wider Middle East. The prospect of 'the world's most active state sponsor of terrorism', being armed with nuclear weapons is a sobering one.

Just as important as the nuclear issue is the present situation in Iraq and the interference of Iran in the internal affairs of that country. Iraq is presently going through a very difficult period. The final outcome in Iraq and therefore its future make-up will have serious implications for the entire Middle East. The prospect of Iraq being ruled by a theocratic system, regardless of whether it is called an Islamic Republic or not, should be a major source of concern for the international community. This is a real risk, bearing in mind the level of Iran's interference in that country.

A related issue that cannot be ignored is the role of Iran as the source of spiritual guidance for Islamic fundamentalists around the world. Iranian officials have for long publicly called Iran "the mother of the Islamic world" and the Iranian Supreme Leader considers himself to be God's representative on earth.

Islamic fundamentalism has for sometime now, represented a serious and immanent challenge to the international community. The undeniable fact is that most, if not all, major terrorist attacks

²² The House Magazine, The Parliamentary Weekly, No 1005, Vol. 27, 23 September 2002

²³ 'Foggy bottom in a fog over Iran?', by Arnold Beichman, The Washington Times, 31 March 2002

over the past two decades have been carried out by Islamic fundamentalist groups. The challenge facing the international community is for it to come up with a solution.

In these circumstances and considering the rise to power of the most radical faction of the Iranian regime, the question is: what is the most effective policy to deal with Iran? The right answer to this question is also the answer to the establishment of peace and stability in Iraq and across the Middle East.

One option is to maintain the policy status quo and continue the same conciliatory policy. This involves concessions and ultimately appeasement in the blind hope of encouraging the 'moderates' in Iran. The proponents of this approach do not offer any positive reasoning in support of their view. Their main argument is that there is no other alternative and that in any event the Iranian regime is well entrenched and the opposition is fragmented. To justify their views, discrediting the Iranian opposition becomes a part of their policy.

There are fundamental problems with this policy option. In negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme, every possible incentive, short of allowing Tehran to acquire the bomb, was put on the table. The United States abandoned its opposition to Iran's membership of the World Trade Organisation and agreed to offer other trade and economic incentives, including lifting the ban on the sale of aircraft parts by AirBus. It also dropped its opposition to hold talks with Tehran and agreed to join in negotiations with the mullahs if Tehran would agree to temporarily suspend its uranium enrichment. Finally, in conjunction with the other four permanent members of the Security Council and Germany it offered the Iranian government the most generous incentive package. The EU-3 went even further in another way, making a commitment to Tehran that if Iran complied with the demand to suspend its nuclear activities, the EU would continue to brand Iran's main opposition movement, the PMOI, as terrorist.²⁴ None of this made any difference, as the mullahs made clear that they would not abandon their nuclear programmes.

It is also wrong to suggest that the regime is well entrenched, especially in the light of widespread protests across Iran in the past year.²⁵ Some 27 years ago, the US government was provided with

²⁴ 'Preparatory text for European proposals on Iranian nuclear program', AFP, 21 October 2004

²⁵ 'Nearly 500 anti-government protests in Iran in past month', Iran Focus website, 22 June 2006

a similar assessment of the situation in Iran by its intelligence community. Iran is not in a revolutionary stage or even pre-revolutionary stage, wrote the CIA station chief from Tehran in 1978.²⁶ That had been echoed earlier by President Jimmy Carter during a New Years Eve dinner in Tehran that year. Whilst toasting the Shah, President Carter said *“Iran... is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world. This is a great tribute to you, your Majesty, and to your leadership, and to the respect and the admiration and love which your people give to you.”*²⁷ A few weeks later, demonstrations engulfed the country that ultimately culminated in the downfall of the Shah's regime.

What proponents of this argument fail to see is the desire of the Iranian people for complete change. The Iranian regime has kept the lid on the very explosive situation in Iran through absolute domestic suppression, as well as taking advantage of the West's willingness to exert pressure on its opposition.

The West must therefore end its policy of “engaging” the mullahs. Engagement, often a euphemism for appeasement, increases the likelihood of a military showdown (the second policy option) by the mere fact that it strengthens the most radical factions of the Iranian regime. However, it must be accepted that a military attack on Muslim Iran by non-Muslim foreign soldiers, does not represent the solution.

The solution is to eradicate the roots of the problem, by uprooting the source of Islamic fundamentalism. The third, more realistic and sensible policy option, presented at a meeting in the European Parliament in December 2004 by Mrs Maryam Rajavi, President-elect of the NCRI, is for the West to support the democratic aspirations of the Iranian people and the opposition as they strive to bring about fundamental change and establish a secular democracy. In an article appearing in the ‘International Herald Tribune’, Mrs Rajavi wrote:

“...the best option is to initiate change through the Iranian people and the organized resistance movement. There is no need for war; no one would want to see an Iraq II played out in Iran. But engagement, which has shaped policy toward Iran on both sides of the Atlantic for two decades,

²⁶ ‘BRIEF ON IRAN’ No. 1308 , 14 January 2000

²⁷ <http://www.theworld.org/worldfeature/Iran/part2.shtml>

has been a disaster, strengthening the most radical factions of the ruling theocracy... The failure to isolate a religious dictatorship bent on spreading its fiery brand of Islamic fundamentalism and acquiring nuclear weapons has led to the current stalemate. Now Tehran's missiles, capable of bearing weapons of mass destruction, can reach eastern and southern Europe...

No concession is going to dissuade the mullahs from continuing their ominous objectives...But there is another answer: democracy. The more than a thousand students who shouted antigovernment slogans during a speech by Khatami at Tehran University last month are evidence that Iranians seek a change in the totality of the regime.

As a first step in that direction, Western governments must not assist the ruling theocracy. And that means removing the terrorist tag that has been put on the People's Mujahedeen Organization. The group is the pivotal force in the largest Iranian opposition coalition, the National Council of Resistance, which has revealed Tehran's nuclear, missile and terrorist plans.” ²⁸

Advocating against the policy option of war with Iran, in January 2005, “The Daily Telegraph” leader instead suggested change brought about by the Iranian people:

“How might we catalyse such a revolution? In three ways.

First, we should cease our dealings with the mullahs. EU countries, in contrast to the Americans, have pursued a policy of ‘constructive engagement’ with Teheran, exchanging state visits and sending Jack Straw on repeated visits...That policy is now in shreds, as Iran's nuclear programme nears completion.

Second, we should give financial and political assistance to dissidents inside the country.

Third, we should back the main resistance group, the People's Mujahidin, which, until recently, we treated as a terrorist organisation in order to appease Khamenei... Iranians are not asking for our soldiers, merely for our active sympathy. Give them the tools, and they will finish the job.” ²⁹

²⁸ ‘Empower Iran’s Opposition Forces’, by Maryam Rajavi, International Herald Tribune, 28 January 2005

²⁹ ‘It wouldn’t take a war to overthrow Iran’s mullahs’, The Daily Telegraph, 22 January 2005

The solution to defeating Islamic fundamentalism is to strengthen and support those Muslims who represent an Islam that is the antithesis to Iran's brand of Islamic fundamentalism - those who will act as a barrier against the spread of fundamentalism.

The West has spent years attacking and restricting the activities of these very Muslims, the PMOI, in an attempt to placate those who profess an ideology that threatens the west's democracies. In this way, the West has restricted the ability of the PMOI to stand up to Iran's Islamic fundamentalism. The result is Islamic fundamentalism having spread to within western societies and its control becoming very difficult.

Policy recommendations

The British Parliamentary Committee for Iran Freedom views the regime as a major threat to peace and stability in the Middle East and the wider world. Moreover, the regime's defiance of the international community and its fomenting of unrest across Iraq and the Middle East are signs of its vulnerability at home. In a private government conducted survey in 2003, 94 per cent of Iranians demanded a total change of regime.³⁰

As was said by 5.2 million Iraqis: *“Presently, the main dispute [in Iraq] is between democracy and dictatorship. The first and most important political alignment in Iraq is between democratic and patriotic forces with their various inclinations and thoughts on the one hand and affiliates of the Iranian regime on the other...”* So, it is not the further involvement of the Iranian regime in Iraqi affairs that will bring about stability in that country, but rather the expulsion of the mullahs and their forces. This includes disarmament of the various militias loyal to Tehran, who are responsible for so much bloodshed and sectarian killings.

To continue appeasement of Iran at a time when it has failed to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1696 calling on it to suspend uranium enrichment and openly defies the international community by announcing the operation of a second cascade of centrifuges for the production of uranium, while also stepping up its terrorist activities across the Middle East, is to reward it for

³⁰ 'The Iranian time bomb', Michael Ledeen, National Review Online, 3 July 2002

its rogue actions. This would have serious consequences for the entire Middle East, as well as peace and stability in the world.

As part of the present policy review, the west must ask itself what it is that the brutal oppressors of the Iranian people most fear. It is not the United States or Britain. It is democracy and those that can bring it about – the 95% of Iranians who despise this regime and support the Iranian Resistance.

Tehran's reaction to Mrs Rajavi's visits to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, the Belgian Senate and the Norwegian Parliament³¹, is an indicator of how much the Ayatollahs fear the true representative of the Iranian people. In Norway, Mrs Rajavi said that the world does not have to choose between foreign military intervention and appeasing Iran's religious rulers. She said: *"There is a third option: Democratic change by the Iranian people and their organised Resistance"*. She added: *"I have a dream: An Iran free of execution and torture, a free and democratic Iran, an Iran where tolerance and peace shall flourish and an Iran at peace and friendship"*.

This is where a solution to the crises in the Middle East rests. The British Parliamentary Committee for Iran Freedom makes the following observations and policy recommendations:-

1. "Export of revolution" and creation of a global Islamic fundamentalist rule are specific goals of the Iranian regime. It is in pursuit of these goals that the Iranian regime instigates crises in the Middle East, most notably in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq.
2. The solution is neither war nor appeasement. The solution is to defeat Islamic fundamentalism by strengthening and supporting those Muslims who represent an Islam that is the antithesis to Iran's brand of Islamic fundamentalism. To achieve this goal, the west must adopt a principled policy towards the Iranian regime and the Iranian Resistance.
3. The west must adopt a firm policy towards the Iranian regime over its human rights abuses, support for terrorism, interference in Iraq and pursuit of nuclear weapons. Comprehensive sanctions should be imposed on the regime to enforce compliance with its international obligations, including Security Council Resolution 1696.

³¹ 'Norway: unacceptable threats from Iran', Aftenposten, 5 November 2006

4. At the same time, the west must support and engage in dialogue with the Iranian Resistance, which represents a tolerant, progressive and democratic Islam - the antithesis to the Iranian regime's Islamic fundamentalism and a barrier to its spread.
5. Instead, the West has attacked and restricted the activities of the NCRI and PMOI in an attempt to placate the mullahs. Proscription of the PMOI has restricted its ability to confront the Iranian regime and expose its atrocities committed against the Iranian people and other Muslim nations in the name of Islam. Labelling the antithesis to the mullahs as terrorists has resulted in the spread of fundamentalism by allowing the mullahs to claim they are the representatives of Islam.
6. Whereas the Iranian regime paints criticism of it by the west as an attack on Islam, it cannot make such claims against the PMOI. By way of example, it cannot claim that the execution of 120,000 Muslim men, women and child sympathisers of the PMOI are for the cause of fighting "Zionism and the global oppression", which it claims in Lebanon and Palestine.
7. The PMOI must be immediately deproscribed. Moreover, the 'protected persons' status of the PMOI members in Iraq must be respected and their refugee status reaffirmed by all, including the Iraqi government. This is a necessary step in pursuit of dialogue, as it allows the west to engage with Iran's regime from a position of strength and not one of weakness.
8. The Iranian regime must be expelled from Iraq, as it is a major source of the problem and not the solution. The militia loyal to Iran, who are responsible for widespread sectarian killings, must be disarmed and disbanded. The west must also recognise the constructive role of the PMOI in Iraq and support the nationalist and anti-fundamentalist forces in Iraq who seek a secular and pluralistic democracy for their country. This represents the demand of 5.2 million Iraqis who signed a statement to this effect in June 2006.