

## **"Iran and the Future of the Middle East"**

**An address by Reza Pahlavi of Iran**

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I am indeed very pleased to be back at Georgetown University, and to once again have the opportunity to spend some time with you and discuss important matters which, without a doubt, concern all of us in these troubled times.

Iran's clerical regime's continued support for terrorism and confrontational behaviour, both regionally and beyond, its lack of transparency on issues such as its nuclear program, its continued repression of its citizenry, and a host of other issues, has rightfully led the world to the conclusion that, as such, this regime cannot be trusted. The Iranian people continue to suffer while the world ponders where all this might lead to. There are numerous topics worthy of discussion. But in light of time, I have chosen to focus tonight on the most recent issues preoccupying the international community.

Let me start by stating that, despite a brief respite owing to the hype created by the publication of the National Intelligence Estimate last December, my homeland Iran, has managed to once again reclaim – for all the wrong reasons – its coveted place as one of the leading headline grabbers in world affairs. Not even Pakistan's tense situation following the assassination of my friend, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, nor the chaotic presidential elections and its violent aftermath in Kenya, as well as the continuing crisis in Iraq and the Levant, have managed to keep Iran and its contentious rulers off the front pages.

At the same time, as the primary season peaks here, and people are increasingly consumed by the election fever sweeping America, Iranians are also being asked to go to the polls on March 14 – to elect a new *Majlis* (parliament). Interestingly, despite the fact that Iran keeps making headlines on a whole host of other issues, and unlike the constant emphasis being made about the “free and fair” nature of the forthcoming Parliamentary elections in Pakistan, or the degree of irregularities in Kenya's much disputed presidential elections last month, very little effort is underway to accurately describe the hoax and circus that is being passed on as “elections” by the ruling clerics in Iran.

While news is gradually surfacing that more than two thirds of the 7000 plus candidates, who have registered to contest 290 seats in the “Islamic Consultative Parliament,” are likely to be “disqualified” – for a variety of reasons, but primarily based on the extent of their commitments to the tenets of the autocratic constitution – there has been no attempt to try and apply the same standards that are being demanded of, say President Musharaf in Pakistan, to the ruling autocrats of Iran!

What is worse is that the international media, eager in having an *entrée* into Iran, are so obsessed with the prospect of getting a “live interview” with any one of Iran's controversial figures over such contentious issues as their calling for the “wiping of Israel

from the face of the earth,” or other similarly preposterous statements, that they pay little to no attention to the fact that they are being hoodwinked into a trap that essentially helps the clerical authorities achieve their aim of passing off their classic Soviet-style elections as something genuine or likely to make a difference to the overwhelming majority of the people.

Let me be clear: the upcoming *Majles* elections in Iran is nothing but a sham, and the Iranian people – whether they are compelled by a variety of reasons to take part, or whether they are able to withstand enormous pressure and boycott the elections – know full well that, no matter who gets into the next *Majles*, they are unlikely to truly represent their will, desire and vision for Iran. Consequently, the next *Majles* will continue to remain a mere pawn in the hands of the “Supreme Leader” and his cohorts.

Let me now turn to a different subject which must today be at the top of the mind of every student of Iranian affairs: The effect of the NIE, especially amongst Iranians.

From my perspective, the most positive aspect of the NIE has been the fact that in the ongoing dispute between Iran and the international community over the regime’s exposed nuclear program and ambitions, the worst option – namely the dreaded military option, against which I have continuously spoken – has been firmly placed in context.

In the weeks prior to the release of the National Intelligence Estimate, despite the fact that it was clearly obvious that diplomatic efforts were by no means exhausted in pressuring the clerical regime to adhere to the will of the U.N. Security Council and the I.A.E.A. vis-à-vis its uranium enrichment program, there was, nonetheless, a crescendo of media-based hype and frenzy, giving the impression that the military option was likely to be exercised much sooner than anyone imagined.

As a consequence of the NIE, there is no question that focus has once again been shifted to reliance on negotiations and diplomatic measures in attempting to resolve this matter. So, while the United States has maintained that its military option has not been removed from the table, there is now a much more sober atmosphere that is most conscious about not allowing matters to get out of hand.

While this development has been a source of relief to me and many Iranians who were dreading the prospect of a catastrophic war, it has at the same time served to lower *morale* amongst ordinary citizens looking for international moral support of their struggle for democracy and human rights, by creating the false impression that the U.S. and its allies were caving into the Islamist regime’s pressures in places like Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan.

This impression was fuelled, not only by the kind of misleading publicity the NIE generated within the international media, but also by the way in which the regime’s propaganda machine projected it as its ultimate vindication and victory over “the Great Satan and its European surrogates.” The level of misperception and deliberate misrepresentation regarding the actual meaning and content of the National Intelligence Estimate has been such that key figures of the clerical regime – believing their own propaganda – have actually demanded that Iran be exonerated of all suspicions, and that its nuclear case at the Security Council be terminated and handed back to the IAEA.

It is a fact that – as a consequence of the NIE – the Islamic regime has been able to gain extra time in the “cat and mouse game” it has so masterfully played with the international community for the past several years. However, it was also inevitable that they could not continue misrepresenting realities beyond a very limited period of time.

Fortunately, as we speak, the implications of the NIE report can be viewed in much more sober terms as they pertain to Iran – as opposed to whatever connotation one might want to attach to it from the perspective of U.S. politics. As far as Iran is concerned, the NIE confirms the fact that the clerical leadership had in fact concealed and mislead the world about their plans for acquiring and developing nuclear weapons, in the sense that according to the report, it was not until 2003 that they actually put a halt to their “nuclear weapons” program – meaning Iran’s nuclear weapon design and weaponization work.

The remainder of the report, while making a number of other comments with varying “degrees of confidence,” entirely misses a critical point in that the underlying reason behind the regime’s troubles with the U.N. Security Council had little to do with its at-the-time covert weaponization work, but instead was due to the regime’s opacity and failure to cooperate with the IAEA on one hand, and its continuing production of fissile material and haste in the development of long range missiles on the other.

To be clear, there was never any question that, unless the Iranian authorities properly addressed the demands that were being put to them over these issues, nothing would be resolved. Hence, it is no surprise that after a delay of some 30 days or more, the “5+1” group are once again in the process of circulating a draft text that will be the basis of a third punitive U.N. Security Council resolution against Iran.

Within Iran, these past several weeks have been a period of extreme concern and anxiety. Although there is general relief over the lowered prospects of military conflict, there is today grave concern about the fact that the U.S. and the international community might be willing to forego the cause of democracy and human rights in Iran, should the Islamist clerical regime demand it as its price in exchange for halting its agitations in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. Such a development, were it to occur, would not only serve to demoralize freedom loving people and democratic movements world wide, but it would more dangerously hand victory to murderers and terrorists throughout the Middle East.

I believe that the current thrust of U.S. policy in the Middle East which is centred on the resolution of the long standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is a positive development and one which I hope will be sustained by the next administration. Undoubtedly, the resolution of this 60 year old conflict will serve as the cornerstone of moderation and stability in the region as a whole.

However, have no doubt that Tehran’s theocracy also has its plan, one which is not compatible with the regional and the international community’s vision of a two state resolution. Through its surrogates and allies in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, the clerical regime is guaranteed to do its utmost to derail and block the current initiative from ever taking off. I believe President Bush’s public comments on Iran, during his recent trip to the Middle East, are partly reflective of his administration’s realization of the same. Of course, this feeds into a greater general unease about the clerical regime’s implicit and explicitly declared long term regional ambitions, threatening the Arab states of the

Persian Gulf, rendering the clerical regime a problem State irrespective of who takes charge of the next U.S. Administration.

In closing, I must state the sobering fact that, in the course of the past three decades, since the arrival of Ayatollah Khomeini and the establishment of the world's first modern-day theocracy, we have witnessed a pattern of escalating violence, war and conflict at unprecedented levels. A cursory review of some of the regional developments during this period in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon and Israel, clearly illustrate the point I am making. Uncertainty about the future, coupled with constant fear of violence and instability, has deprived the people of the Middle East from creating the kind of environment that is both peaceful and conducive for developing their full potential. The question which begs attention is: what must be done to avoid a similar pattern in the next 30 years, or better yet, how best to put an end to it?

Seen from that perspective, the choices are very clear. It is essential that forces of moderation, tolerance and enlightenment succeed in isolating and neutralizing the forces of darkness and violence which have no compunction whatsoever in resorting to mass terror in order to promote their hateful agenda. It is in this overall battle of ideas that the solid and unwavering moral support of the West and its liberal democratic values are so essential in determining the final outcome.

I firmly believe that the people of Iran have a huge role to play in this great battle. As a nation, we have experienced and directly endured the consequences of an inept, corrupt and oppressive government that has failed to meet the daily needs of a robust population that is craving to play its rightful part, in line with the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I am convinced that with the establishment of secular democracy in Iran – something that is fully understood and compatible with the wishes of the overwhelming majority of Iranians – and the end of the regime's sponsorship of terror, the region will get its chance to start anew. A democratic Iran will usher a new era that will, within a generation, positively transform the Middle East and beyond.

Therefore, let me conclude by saying that my compatriots need your moral support today in their struggle for freedom and human rights. We need to be assured that the free world will never deviate over matters of principle.

Help us help you in the greater battles that must be won, if we are to succeed with the positive visions we all share: putting an end to tension, violence and instability, and promoting peace, understanding and tranquillity in the Middle East.