

Introductory remarks: Mark Dubowitz

Keynote remarks: Senator Ted Cruz

Featuring panelists: Amb. Eric Edelman, Mariam Memarsadeghi and Ray Takeyh

Moderated by: Reuel Marc Gerecht

DUBOWITZ: Hi, my name is Mark Dubowitz and I'm chief executive of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Thanks so much for joining us today; I hope everybody is staying safe and healthy. Today's event is a discussion on the future of Iran. And as many of you know, FDD has a robust Iran program that covers every aspect of the Iran portfolio, addressing illicit finance, nonproliferation, counterterrorism, human rights, and the regime's domestic power apparatus. Our Iran program is just one component of a broader national security and foreign policy portfolio. We are a source for timely research analysis for the executive branch, for congress, the media, and the broader national security community. In 2019, Iran sanctioned FDD and me, erroneously calling us the "designing and executing arm of the U.S. government on Iran policy." But, we were very grateful that these threats led to widespread and bipartisan condemnation from the Trump administration and from former officials in the Obama, Bush and Clinton administrations as well as the media and the broader national security community. Our work on Iran continues, if you are interested in this work, please go to our website at fdd.org and click on the Iran program.

We will begin today's event with remarks from Senator Ted Cruz. Senator Cruz has represented the great state of Texas since 2013. He serves on a number of important Senate committees including Foreign Relations, Judiciary and Commerce. And after hearing from Senator Cruz we will jump into our expert panel. We will hear from four of our experts. So, thanks so much for joining us, and with that, I'm very pleased to welcome Senator Ted Cruz.

CRUZ: It's good to be with you. I want to thank you all for inviting me to speak with you today about the future of Iran. Right now, the United States is at a critical juncture in our relationship with Iran.

Five years ago, President Obama entered the United States into a nuclear agreement with Iran that gave the Iranian regime the resources to wreak enormous havoc across the region. As you know far too well, the catastrophic Obama Iran Nuclear Deal reconnected Iran to the global financial system while also flooding the Ayatollahs with hundreds of billions of dollars in sanctions relief, gifting them everything they needed to launder vast sums of money across the world for terrorism and proliferation. This included \$1.7 billion in unmarked cash to the Ayatollah, which helped fund attacks against U.S. military bases as a part of a ransom for hostages, because the Obama administration knew how it would look if they implemented the deal without at least some of the hostages being released.

I urged President Trump to withdraw from this disastrous deal. Within the Trump administration, there was a major battle. Both the State and Defense Department, opposed pulling out of the deal. And yet two years ago, President Trump agreed with me, and he pulled out of the deal. I think that's the single most important foreign policy decision that has been made in the entire Trump administration. After that, again as you know far too well, work still remained to be done. After we pulled out of the deal, there were still a whole series of waivers in place, keeping much of the deal still alive. The most important of these was the oil waiver. We had a waiver in place that allowed Iran to sell about a million barrels a day of oil, primarily to China and India. And that was the principal source of revenue for the Ayatollah and for his funding of terrorism against America.

Once again, there was a battle within the Trump administration about whether to end the oil waiver. The State Department argued, "No, don't end the oil waivers. It'll cause the global price of oil to skyrocket." The Department of Energy, on the other hand to their credit, took the other side, and they said, "Yes, absolutely end it. There's plenty of oil supply in the world. It's not going to cause prices to skyrocket." I engaged both the State Department and the Department of Energy publicly, and even more vigorously in private, and made the case to the president directly: we should end the oil waiver. The president agreed. In the end, we now know that State was wrong and Energy was right. Oil prices didn't skyrocket. And so what State was saying was demonstrably false.

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Then there were the civilian nuclear waivers. At places like Iran's Fordow facility, which was dug into the side of a mountain specifically for the purpose of building nuclear weapons to attack the United States of America, we were allowing continued international cooperation. I was proud to lead bicameral calls in Congress with Lindsey Graham and Liz Cheney. Together we introduced legislation to revoke the civil nuclear waivers that the administration had been granting, which allowed Iran to continue building up its nuclear program.

In May of this year, after enormous battles internally within the administration, President Trump once again did the right thing and ended the civil nuclear waivers for Iran, which was a big step in the right direction. Now it's time for the United States to finally and irreversibly end what remains of the disastrous deal and the benefits that Iran gets from it by invoking the sanction snapback described in the deal's United Nations resolution. Unless we do so, the UN's arms embargo, the ballistic missile bans, will inevitably expire, allowing Russia and China to start selling billions of dollars of weapons to Iran.

Toward that end, I'm leading the push right now to get the administration to go to the UN and to invoke the snapback in UN Security Council Resolution 2231. We don't need anyone else's permission to use this mechanism. We can go there tomorrow and begin the process, which will finally shred the disastrous Obama Iran Nuclear Deal once and for all.

Of course, the challenges posed by Iran go far beyond the nuclear issue. The Iran regime's malign activities are well known. Missile proliferation; seeking destruction of America and our allies, including Israel; creating terrorist states within states in Iraq, in Yemen, in Lebanon; floating the Assad regime in Syria; funding and directing terrorism across the globe; and of course, inside Iran, over and over again, unthinkable human rights atrocities. Part of the response to these activities involve tearing up the nuclear deal, the right thing to do, because the nuclear deal forced us to give up our most powerful sanctions against these behaviors. And the Trump administration has taken significant and meaningful steps to reverse course and to impose maximum pressure on Iran and to diplomatically isolate Iran, including taking out Soleimani, a designated terrorist responsible for the deaths of at least 603 United States servicemen and women. We must do more.

When we're talking about the future of Iran, it is my belief that we need to collapse the regime. This used to be a straightforward and broadly accepted idea. The Iranian regime unremittently seeks our destruction. "Death to America," the Ayatollah chants. And we will not be safe until it's gone. Somehow in recent years, particularly as a fallout from the Obama Iran Deal, that became viewed as a radical idea, because it was seen as synonymous with regime change followed by endless nation-building of the sort that we have needlessly, foolishly and catastrophically pursued in Iraq. But of course, that's not what it necessarily means. Some people think that guns or tanks or missiles are the only things that matter, but truth has the power to transform the world. And we have the tools alongside the power of truth that stop far short of war, from bolstering our allies to economic pressure.

It wouldn't be the first time we'd applied such a strategy to a regime that sought our destruction. In my Senate office in Washington, I have three busts. A bust of Winston Churchill, a bust of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a bust of Ronald Reagan. And the reason for that is that I think all three understood the power of speaking truth; the power of words and clarity of vision. Yes, Churchill commanded an army, but Churchill's real lasting impact came through the words and vision that roused the world to defend freedom. I have a bust of Ronald Reagan in my office because he demonstrated that truth is powerful and it can transform the world. Also in my office as a gigantic painting of Reagan standing before the Brandenburg Gate, saying the words, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." I think those are the most important words uttered by any leader in modern times.

Some years ago, I was in Jerusalem, where I had the opportunity to visit with Natan Sharansky, the famed Soviet dissident. And Sharansky told me about how, when he was in the depths of the Russian gulag, the prisoners would pass from cell to cell notes. “Did you hear what President Reagan said? Evil empire. Ash-heap of history. Tear down this wall.” As important as those words were, a whole lot of people don’t know the backstory behind President Reagan standing before the Brandenburg Gate.

Three times, the State Department edited those words, “Tear down this wall,” out of the speech. And three times, Reagan, with his own hand, wrote them back. And they proceeded to have arguments where the State Department said, “Mr. President, you can’t say this. Mr. President, this is too belligerent. This is unrealistic. We all know the Berlin Wall will stand for all eternity. So you simply can’t say something like this.” And each time Reagan wrote it back with a smile and said, “You don’t understand. This is the whole point of the speech.” And just a few years after those historic words were declared, the Berlin Wall was torn to the ground. That’s important to reflect on.

And our high school history classes, our college history classes, don’t teach it, but the United States didn’t bomb the Berlin Wall. We didn’t send in tanks to demolish it. It was simply the power of words, the power of truth, the power of sunshine, the power of light. Tyrannies fear truth and light. That’s something America should remember. That our principles, that truth, that freedom, can tear down walls, can topple tyrannies, can promote liberty. Our options in foreign policy aren’t simply sending in the Marines or doing nothing, but rather, the United States should consistently be a voice for freedom. We should be a voice for human rights. We should be a voice for democracy. Because truth is powerful and it can transform the world.

This is also where our strategy with Iran comes into play. Just as Ronald Reagan brought down the Soviet Union with strategic strength and by boldly speaking the truth, we likewise must work to collapse the Iranian regime that oppresses its people and seeks to sow terror all over the world. I know this is possible, and not only that, it’s necessary. Please know that I’m working tirelessly with my colleagues in Congress to hold the Iranian regime accountable for working to develop nuclear weapons. Maximum pressure should mean maximum pressure. We must continue to vocally and unapologetically stand up to the evil Iranian regime, and we must exert maximum pressure and not allow the Ayatollahs to build a nuclear program. That, I believe, is the only reasonable path forward.

In closing, I want to thank you all at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies for hosting this important event today and for your tireless efforts to hold the Iranian regime accountable. I also want to thank you again for the excellent research and the analysis you all do to strengthen our national security and to mitigate threats to the United States from hostile nations all over the world. Your work is important, it makes a difference, and I’m proud to stand with you. Thank you, and God bless you.

DUBOWITZ: Thank you to Senator Cruz for those insightful remarks and for your leadership in the Senate, pushing back against the malign and destructive activities of the Islamic Republic. And now for additional insight into the topic, I’m very pleased to introduce you to our panel of experts. Eric Edelman is a senior advisor at FDD. He previously served as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy at the Pentagon and is a former Ambassador to Turkey and Finland. Mariam Memarsadeghi co-founded Tavaana, a civic education and civil society capacity building initiative in Iran. She is an outspoken advocate for democracy, civic learning, Internet freedom and women’s rights. Ray Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He previously served as a senior advisor at the U.S. State Department. And our moderator for today’s discussion is my FDD colleague, Reuel Marc Gerecht. Reuel is a senior fellow at FDD, conducts extensive research on the Iran issue, including in Farsi, and he has written at length about the regime in Iran. He previously served as a Middle East specialist at the CIA’s Directorate of Operations. Reuel, over to you.

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GERECHT: I want to thank Mark for the nice intro and jump right in to a discussion of Ray and Eric's fine essay in *Foreign Affairs* about regime change. Eric, let's start, I think with you. And why don't you just tell me why Iran deserves a regime change policy? Why is it the Islamic Republic is so special that it should have the devoted attention of the U.S. government and we should want to see the theocracy fall?

EDELMAN: Reuel, thank you very much for the nice words about the article that Ray and I did. Ray and Mariam, in some ways are better positioned to discuss why Iran, in my view, requires the U.S. to follow a policy of regime change. I think they can talk at greater length about the nature of the regime, which is predicated on a revolutionary ideology that sees enmity towards the United States as sort of a founding organizing principle that makes it very unlikely that the issues that we have had with the Islamic Revolution since 1979 can be really adjudicated through normal diplomacy. I mean, the definition of diplomacy of course, is "the adjudication of national interests via negotiation rather than through military means." But that requires a willingness to actually compromise and negotiate.

And where I think I can speak with some authority, not as much as they on the nature of the regime, and I hope they will expound on that, the record of U.S. interactions with Iran since the revolution has a distressing sameness to it, which is beginning within negotiations over the freeing of the hostages that Jimmy Carter undertook, and then subsequent efforts to negotiate with the regime, whether it was the misbegotten efforts that led to the Iran-Contra scandal, whether it was the efforts of the Clinton administration to find some kind of path to negotiating with the Khatami regime after President Khatami was elected, whether it was the on-again off-again discussions that the Bush administration had with Iran over Afghanistan, over Iraq, and then over at the end of the Bush administration over the nuclear issue or the Obama administration's negotiations with Iran, they have a distressing sameness, which is Americans thinking that differences between so-called moderates and so-called pragmatists will allow the U.S. to somehow manipulate these internal differences in order to come out with some kind of negotiated solution to the various issues that we've had with the regime, support for terrorists, support for proxies, its determination to see Israel destroyed.

And of course, its nuclear program as well as its human rights abuses. And none of those things have ever been adjudicated. This is what my former boss, Secretary of Defense Bob Gates called the "continuing American search for the elusive Iranian moderates." And I think Ray and I have concluded that given the deep differences we have with Iran and the danger that Iran presents to, among other things, the Gulf and our Arab allies in the region in Israel, this is likely headed for some kind of military confrontation, absent some effort to change the nature of the regime and replace it with one that the Iranian people deserve and which the American government can negotiate with.

GERECHT: I would say that it could be headed towards the military confrontation, assuming United States is willing to fight. Or it could be a military confrontation with others.

EDELMAN: Fair enough.

GERECHT: Ray, Mariam, do you have anything to add to that? Is there something in particular, something special about the Islamic Republic that you think that commands a more aggressive policy towards it?

TAKEYH: Well, let me just briefly begin. First of all, I want to thank FDD, Mark Dubowitz and Cliff May for putting this event together, it was a very generous thing for FDD to do. I would add very little to what Eric has to say, because I think he did a great deal of the analysis that was quite persuasive. The question that I always deal with, or began with, is not whether or not United States should have the regime change policy, is whether the United States will be willing to aid the Iranian people in their quest to change the regime. That's kind of framing the issue in a different way. And there

are a number of things you need for a regime change policy to succeed, or for the regime collapse to happen. Number one is widespread disaffection from the public and I think you see in every social class within the country, in every particular province.

Number two is a citizenry that recognizes what is wrong with the country and who is responsible for it. And number three is something that people don't often talk about is the persistent shrinking of the Iranian elite, a sort of the defection from the regime itself. It is often suggested that this regime has maintained elite solidarity, and if you look at the categories of people that were present at the creation and the people that are there today, the history of the Islamic Republic has been one of relentlessly purging its own cadre. There's former prime minister Mir Hossein Mousavi is under house arrest. The former speaker, Mehdi Karroubi, is under house arrest. The former deputy minister of interior Mostafa Tajzadeh is one of the most strident critics of the regime.

This is not a regime that has maintained solidarity within its elite core. The question that's out there, and I don't know if this answer, maybe Mariam can address it, is the resilience of the security services. That is one of the things that we don't know. I would say from my study of the Shah period, the one thing that the American intelligence community failed to understand is how to hollow out the Shah's military force, which is why in February 1979, Zbig Brzezinski is asking Dutch Huyser to do a coup. The unanswerable question is the resilience of the security forces and they're willing to repress –

GERECHT: Can I just jump in there on one thing, I mean, you're correctly noting how the regime has sort of devoured its children, but at the same time, if you were looking at Soviet parallel, most of the original Soviet generation were done in by Stalin yet the regime kept going, was able to recycle itself for quite some time. So simply the devouring its own, it doesn't necessarily mean the regime doesn't have legs.

TAKEYH: Well, I would ask Eric as a Sovietologist to actually answer the question about the scale and scope of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union I don't think is matched in Iran. Iranians attempted – the regime attempted – to have a political party, the Islamic Republican party that was dismissed in 1987, but I think Communist Party had tentacles throughout the country, throughout the Soviet Union that is unmatched by any organizational network of the Islamic Republic, but I'll lead to Eric and Mariam to kind of think it, Eric do we think about the comparison and Mariam as well.

GERECHT: Mariam, did you have something to say? Go ahead please.

MEMARSADEGHI: Yes. To answer the first question about why it's deserving, Iran is deserving. It's really not an act of charity from the United States to want to pursue regime change or to help, as Ray said, the Iranian people as they pursue a democratic transition. It's an opportunity for the United States to get rid of its main problem in the Middle East. And it's a matter of what kind of future can the world have with a Middle East that is much more peaceful, much more stable, much more predictable. So, Iran, there's plenty of reasons to want to have regime change in Iran that has nothing to do with morality or the Iranian people. Obviously, my personal motivation is the people of Iran and the morality, but even for the Iranian people, there's a deep sense of shame for example, about what the regime has done in Syria, what the regime is doing against Israel, the animosity towards America. And I wanted to mention, because we have so much in common, we agree on so much with regards to the regime change, I thought it would be interesting, Reuel, and I should also say thank you to Mark Dubowitz and FDD, especially for this panel, but in general, FDD's work on Iran has made it such that it's impossible to imagine the conversation and policy-making about Iran without FDD now.

I wanted to speak about some disagreements I have with some of the points in the article, because I thought that they were important and all of them interestingly have to do with thinking or the evolution of the predominant thought patterns of the Iranian people. So, the article says that the revolution was sort of predicated on, or that its initial impetus and motivation was representative government and that there were democratic elements within the revolution, it was really a sort of a positive hope that went wrong. I take some issue with that. And I think a lot of Irani, more importantly, a lot of Iranians today have a strong resentment of the revolution – so not just a resentment of Khomeini in the Islamic Republic and what the last 41 years have been about, but the revolution itself and the democratic elements or the liberal elements were actually sort of embodied in Bakhtiar and Bakhtiar was anti-revolution. He was trying – the people who supported Bakhtiar were supporting him because they thought that they could see the evil that was coming if things didn't go the way of reform.

GERECHT: It's fair to say that Bahktiar was an evolutionist, not a revolutionary, right?

MEMARSADEGHI: Yeah. And the people who supported him were very much afraid of what they could see coming down the road. I think even more than the United States of America could see it at the time. So why is that important today? Because people today, on the streets, the slogans, the conversations, the online activity is very much about rejecting the revolution. So, something that is in the article is that that initial hope is still there, but really the people are rejecting what that revolution was about. And I think in the same way that you wouldn't say that, like the Russian Revolution had something in common with the people like Sakharov or Havel or that the Cuban revolution and Che Guevara and Fidel had something to do with what the dissidents are about today. Iran has gone through the same thing. So, whereas the revolution was about Shariati and Marx, today it's about the U.S. Constitution and John Locke and really, how do we get the hell out of this? Because it's a mess.

GERECHT: Ray, would you agree with that?

TAKEYH: Yeah, I think that's a good argument. I think that's a fair point. I do think that if you go back even before Prime Minister Bakhtiar, who actually has written one memoir that doesn't get much attention called *37 Days After 37 Years*. His premiership was 37 days and the Shah's tenure was 37 years. And as early as August 5th, 1978, the Shah gives a Constitutional Day speech where he promises parliamentary reform, elections and all kinds of reforms and the monarchy, as well as Shapour Bakhtiar. And even before him, there was an agreement. I don't want to get too far into the weeds between the opposition and the Shah regarding some sort of a constitutional monarchy. The ironic aspect of the revolution was that whatever was left of the monarchy, and certainly Shapour Bakhtiar, who was a courageous individual, were offering the Iranian people a democratic representation based upon constitutional liberalism that was rejected.

It forsake an Islamic government whose contours were either poorly defined or Khomeini simply lied. Khomeini simply lied about what the Islamic government would look like. So, it is true that the ultimate promise of liberalism in 1978, 1979, was offered by those on the other side of the revolution. But Khomeini was very cagey about what he was saying. He was a jumble of contradictions, he would say things that, "women have rights in the Islamic Republic so long as they adhere to religious restrictions," "political parties are acceptable so long as they don't challenge the state," "the rule of law is very prominent, but it has to be based on Islamic considerations."

So, he was a jumble of contradictions that nobody managed to detangle precisely, but the argument that Iranian people –

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GERECHT: I think it's fair to say that if you were as charismatic as Khomeini was, you're allowed a certain confusion in your ideas.

TAKEYH: He wasn't confused. He wasn't confused. He was mendacious.

GERECHT: Right, right, right.

EDELMAN: Reuel, I'd like to, if we could, because I have a question for the three of you who know far more about Iran than I do, but you raised the question of the Soviet parallel and there's no question that the collapse of the Soviet Union looms a little bit. It's not something we refer to very directly in our article, but it clearly looms large in some of our thinking here. And I remember, in reference to Ray's comment about the Soviet Communist Party and the lack of a similar mechanism in the Islamic Republic to get down into society. I remember precisely the moment when I first contemplated the notion that the long twilight struggle with the Soviet Union that Jack Kennedy described in his inaugural address might actually come to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Then I think, Reuel, you and I maybe talked about it in the past. It was a meeting in the Bubble at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow with Jack Downing, the then station chief in Moscow, who was also station chief in Beijing and was – I'm not sure whether this was in your time or not, but he was the Deputy Director of Intelligence at CIA, and Jack said, "You know, the problem here is that this regime can no longer replace itself. The elite can no longer replace itself because the Komsomol can no longer recruit people into the party to form the transmission belts between party and Soviet citizens that allows this whole place to function."

And it was like a light bulb going off in my head, because I literally had never contemplated the notion that the Soviet Union might just go away someday.

And so, my question to the three Iranists on the panel here is, where does the regime stand in terms of its ability – I mean, we know that there's an enormous popular hostility to the regime and we've seen it explode periodically over the last several years, including use of slogans about some of the issues that Mariam was talking about, about support for the Palestinians in Syria and overall Iranian interventionist policy in the region.

My question is, what is happening with regime recruitment? Are they able to actually replace themselves with capable people who can actually run the system? Because that's the other question. It's not just recruitment because obviously you can recruit anybody, but can you actually replace yourself with, as I might've said in my Soviet days, capable cadres for manning the system?

MEMARSADEGHI: Reuel, I think as an answer to that question, I think that the article is very much right in that there's a revolutionary ideology and the regime is never going to give up. But I would say that more than the ideology; the reason that they're not giving up is because they don't want to lose power. It's about regime survival and the mafia state and feeling very much trapped like there's no alternative to keep going in this very, very corrupt and insular regime. It doesn't mean that there are not people who still believe in the ideology strongly. I would say Soleimani was probably one of those who was very effective and respected by those insider regime types because he exuded allegiance. He exuded belief.

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But for the most part, going to whether the actual forces that are supposed to repress will in fact repress, Ray's question, I think it's very much related to the financials, the money. And that's why the sanctions are such a critical and very important variable. Something that has changed a lot since the Obama era. They're squeezed.

And so, as you say in the article, people from the poor parts of the cities are being sent back into the poor parts of the cities to kill their brothers and neighbors. Well, are they going to do it on a very, very meager salary anymore?

GERECHT: Well, but I mean, I would play devil's advocate there. What happened last November and December, now we don't know whether they're actually going back in the same neighborhoods. And I think the regime has been reasonably clever at trying to deploy security forces that aren't actually from the same area.

MEMARSADEGHI: Or even Iranian.

GERECHT: Right. Sometimes not even Iranian or they do the Azeri-Persian split. But I do think it's fair to say that from the evidence of November and December, that they were able to kill ruthlessly and the regime demonstrated that yes, it can still mow down with enfiling fire men, and more importantly, women. Because in 2009, I think there was a shockwave that went through Iran when Neda Agha-Soltan was shot down and she was bleeding out. I mean, that was quite graphic.

I can't think of anything comparable to that with the crackdown that occurred last winter. In fact, if anything, the regime Supreme Leader in particular, sort of gloated at the brutality, the effective brutality that was used. Ray, you want to talk about the issue about regeneration of personnel?

TAKEYH: I think if you look at the book that we have talked about, Parsa's book, where he actually goes through statistics. Islamic Republic is a very unusual form of government. Its constantly published statistics that undermine its whole claim to legitimacy. And he was talking about the recruitment into seminary and the fact that so many of the mosques no longer have Friday prayer leaders because people don't want to join the seminary, don't want to join the clergy. And so, in that sense, I think you're already beginning to see some statistical deflation in terms of the Islamic Republic.

I want to talk a little bit about the point that Reuel made about security forces' performance last November. This is not a question about killing 150 people, who seemed to have been killed as far as we know. I don't know. During the Iranian Revolution 2,781 people were killed. There were a time when the Shah's regime actually did manage to use force on a selective basis and brutal basis.

But the question of security forces' resilience to me is not their ability to repress episodic eruptions of demonstrations, whether they can actually deal with the sustained opposition movement over a period of time. And what you saw in 2009 is, if the opposition had gone from 15 cities to 35 cities, the regime will probably not have the capacity to control the entire country. One of the things that we saw with the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the deliberations of the military officers that the Islamic Republic published later on is then when they were looking at the scale of demonstrations, they were saying, "Okay, maybe we can control Mashad, Tehran, but we were losing control over that city, we're losing control over this city or that city."

There is a capacity issue. And so, the question isn't, whether its simple opposition-demonstration, even one that lasted a week or so, could be repressed, because the Shah did this in 1963-64. The question is if the Iranian dissident

movement can mobilize itself in an active opposition force that is sustained over a period of time, then it is my judgment, and it's more intuitive than empirical, that those security forces would not be able to discharge their obligations.

GERECHT: No, but you could go back to Eric's question about the regime recycling the elite. Let me play devil's advocate. Let's use the mafia parallel. The Italian mafia, Sicilian mafia, they were pretty stupid in the 1930's and 1940's. All right? It was not Francis Ford Coppola's rendition. These were largely – not terribly bright individuals. The mafia lost a lot of power in the United States and in some places was wiped out because, one, other gangs came in that were more predatory, and two, because an outside force, the FBI, decided to really go after them. And the discovery the FBI made is when they went after them, that these people are really stupid. But it did require an outside force.

And let's move that to the United States for a moment. I mean, the Trump administration certainly has been more willing than previous administrations to exert pressure on the regime. We had for at least 18 months, a gentleman as national security advisor, John Bolton, who probably believed in regime change more enthusiastically than any previous national security advisor. Yet you cannot say that the Trump presidency, Mr. Trump in particular, has wanted to adopt a regime strategy. If you listen to Senator Cruz's speech, he talks about pressure, but at the same he's running away from the Iraq experience. He's suggesting that the idea of having a democracy in Iraq is really not something the United States wants to get into. He was opposed to an increased American presence in Syria. So, that means containment would be an issue for individuals on the right, as well as the left.

So, can you envision a scenario for me, if it didn't happen now with the Trump administration, if it didn't happen with John Bolton, where are we with actually having an administration that could adopt the tactics that you and Eric advocated in your *Foreign Affairs* piece? How do you see that? Actually, is that possible? And certainly, imagine Biden winning the presidency. Is there a scenario that you could realistically see where Democrats and Republicans would back an approach, a containment approach, a regime change approach, and I equate the two, that could be effective?

TAKEYH: Eric is the senior partner of this law firm, so he always goes first.

EDELMAN: So, Senator Biden has said a couple of times that, if he's elected, he wants to get back into the Iran Nuclear Deal. I think some of that was driven by a sense that, after the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, that Iran began to increase its enrichment of uranium and was developing stockpiles that would shorten the so-called breakout timeline.

Now, I think given the explosions at Natanz and the apparent, and it's more than one, and it's more than one facility apparently, there's clearly been some sabotage of the Iranian nuclear program, and I don't think we know yet how severe that is. I did see that David Sanger and Ronen Bergman in *The New York Times* were saying that, according to some intelligence sources, this has setback the program by up to two years.

So, it may be that if a Biden administration is elected and if they come in, that they won't feel quite as much time pressure to get back into the same kind of agreement to limit the Iranian nuclear program. And it may be that they, at least some of the folks associated with Biden, may be more open to the argument that the Trump administration's efforts have actually provided a new administration with an awful lot of leverage in terms of sanctions, and that it would be foolish to just go back into the JCPOA as it was.

Because even many of the people involved in that effort under President Obama recognized, in conversations, that there were some very severe shortcomings of that agreement, the failure to, for instance, cover Iran's ballistic missile

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program. The fact that after the JCPOA, although there was a hope that Iran would moderate its behavior broadly in the region, in fact, the reverse took place.

And so, I think there has been some, I would say, chastening of some of the people, not all of them, but some of the people who are involved in this effort. And one of the purposes of Ray's and my article and other efforts I think, is to try and inform their thinking. And I do think there may be some members of a putative Biden administration who, number one, looking back on the Obama administration's failure to support the Green Revolution in 2009, have a bit of a bad conscience about that, and second, most definitely do not want a Biden administration to get caught up in a military conflict with Iran. And they will face some very nasty choices because if you want to avoid a military conflict with Iran, but you don't want to have to deal with Iranian threats to undermine your allies, both Arab and Israeli –

GERECHT: But Eric, couldn't I just play devil's advocate again? I mean the traditional response here to the fear of military conflict has been appeasement.

EDELMAN: That's correct, and that would probably be the default position. I'm just trying to sketch out a potential alternative avenue that some people who don't feel that the appeasement that they engaged in in the Obama years actually paid off. You know, sometimes people do learn from mistakes in government, that they might see assistance, including both overt and covert assistance, in the way that Ray and Mariam have discussed, basically not for the United States to go in and do something, but to enable Iranian people to do what they manifestly would like to do, which is to get rid of this dictatorial regime and replace it with something that is more representative and less oppressive.

GERECHT: Mariam, did you want to say something?

MEMARSADEGHI: Yes. Thank you so much. I think, yeah, on that note, I think it's important to sort of do an inventory of what this administration has gotten right. If it's going to be Biden or a continuation of this administration, one thing they've done very well is to keep up the pressure, and not just in terms of sanctions, but rhetoric, and tying the sanctions not just to the nuclear program, but to the human rights violations.

So, it resonates very strongly, very well inside the country when there's a focus by administration officials on the corruption of regime officials, of how their money, how the people's money is being spent abroad to kill other people basically. And when there is repression inside the country, when there's condemnation from the U.S. government, it's very important. And when there's holding up of dissidence inside the country, just as the United States, the Reagan administration did during the end of the Cold War years, it's extremely powerful. I can't state that enough.

So, the rhetoric is very important. I hope that that continues no matter what, as I think we're all kind of agreeing, coalescing on this point, that I think the real pressure or galvanization, any kind of momentum toward regime change is going to come from the people. But when they get to that place where there's a tipping point like the Green Movement, in my opinion, really was. And if the United States had simply taken a few decisions in a different direction, things could have really gone differently.

GERECHT: Mariam, could you, just for the historian in me, could you give me the hypotheticals? What should have President Obama done to change that equation of what happened in 2009?

MEMARSADEGHI: Well, some of the negatives had already started unfortunately. He had already written two letters to the Supreme Leader by the time that the Green Movement was out on the streets. And so that does affect things. I

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understand that the bureaucracy doesn't act as quickly as we would like, but I think that there was never any intention from Obama himself to try and go for any kind of fundamental shift in Iran. And that's just an unfortunate – That's just the way I see that administration and I see Obama himself. I mean, he has never said he regretted it. Other people in the administration have. He's never said that he regretted it.

When people were out, as a historical point, Reuel, people were out on the streets, unmistakably, with the slogan "Barack Hussein Obama ya ba oona, ya ba ma." "Obama, you're either with them, the regime, or with us, the people." And right after that, Obama came and made a statement that it really doesn't matter to us who wins this election as if it was about the election. It wasn't about the election. You've got people out on the streets saying, "Death to the dictator," or "no to Gaza, no to Lebanon."

GERECHT: I don't disagree with you. I mean, I wish we could recast history, though I would say that probably having individuals, the leaders of the Green Movement, who were as anti-American as any in the Islamic Republic, having someone like Mousavi who was, in addition to being somewhat of a left wing thug in an Islamic setting, also just could never, ever let loose of his anti-Americanism, that the coincidence there, the confluence of events was rather regrettable.

MEMARSADEGHI: Unfortunate, yes, absolutely. But the slogans on this, I mean, if somebody wanted to believe in the people at that moment in time, they could have believed in the people and not the leadership, the ostensible leadership of the movement. The leadership of the movement, at some point, I think was the biggest handicap of the movement in the sense that they held them back. They held the people back.

If I can really quickly, that's what's working with the current administration's policy, the sanctions as pressure on the regime, but the rhetoric as pressure on the regime, and also, as solidarity with the people. But there are things the administration, this administration or any administration, should be doing that haven't been done so far and can really make a difference. One is to have –

GERECHT: Okay, let me – Okay, go ahead. Go ahead.

MEMARSADEGHI: Very quickly, I'm sorry, broadcasting. We do not take the, in my opinion, very large sums of money that we spend on Voice of America and Radio Farda seriously. Voice of America needs an absolute and fundamental change; otherwise, we're better off shutting it down. It would send a much, much stronger message to the Iranian people.

GERECHT: Mariam, let me play devil's advocate. I mean, this is a complaint I had on Ray and Eric's piece, is that, I mean, it does go over a certain terrain that we have gone over many times. And if we all know the common definition of insanity, is to do the same thing over and over again and expect a different result. I mean, American broadcasting, I think it's fair to say that Iranian dissidents, activists, both outside of the country and inside of the country, would like to see American broadcasting become a vehicle for, essentially, regime change, a vehicle for activism, a vehicle for democracy.

However, I mean, VOA can't be that. I think by statute, it's pretty hard for it to become that. RFERL, it's a more of a gray area there. But I mean, there is a reason why you consistently have resistance inside of those organizations to doing the things that you want to do that have nothing to do with the personnel.

MEMARSADEGHI: No. No. I disagree.

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GERECHT: Let me just – One other issue, and it's more directed to Eric and to Ray, and that is you talk a bit about the role of the CIA. You talk a bit about the role of allies that might participate; I think primarily the Israelis and the Saudis. And on the first one, I would say, all right, if you do not have a bipartisan consensus, how in the world can you use the CIA for anything? Because institutionally, they're going to resist you. So, I think you need to have bipartisan consistence, otherwise the leaks will off any effort to get anything remotely clandestine up and running.

And on the role of the allies, I would say similarly, unless you have a bipartisan consensus on this, it's very difficult for me to see effective allied participation. And I'll leave aside whether the fact the Saudis could possibly do anything that's helpful other than just throw money.

So, I'll throw that back to you, or you can go back, Mariam, and answer the question on broadcasting, and then what we can go to the second question on the agency and allies.

MEMARSADEGHI: Just really quickly, there was a time when VOA Persian was very effective, professional and popular under the George W. Bush administration. What I'm saying and what others are saying is just, be as good as it once was. Not to be a tool in the hands of the opposition so much as at least be reputable, at least not be a very corrupt and just really disrespected channel. There are other channels doing a very good job, and I think until VOA looks the way as it does right now to the Iranian people, the way that they view American will for any kind of real change and taking the people seriously is tarnished.

TAKEYH: Whatever you think of the American broadcasting services, I think we can agree that given the recent personnel changes, they have become less effective, given some of the things that have recently happened. Whatever they were before, they're probably not going to be as good as even that today. In terms of the leadership of the Green Movement being anti-American, I think they were overwhelmed by the opposition at State. I'm not sure of the anti-American part, I mean Solzhenitsym that did not have a high opinion of the United States, I think it's fair to say. I mean, just read his Harvard commencement address.

I would say one of the things that the regime has done, which has been brilliant in terms of perpetuating this rule, is to begin a nuclear program and invite arms control discussions about that program. Because it is my estimation that it is very difficult for arms control and a policy of regime pressure to coexist. To me, arms control and détente are the flip side of the same coin. And I do realize people will say that we pursued arms control and destruction of the Soviet Union at the same time, I will say that is not true in 1970s, the height of the arms control between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was true during the first Reagan administration when there was no rule, and then there was just so much pressure on the – so I don't believe arms control and attempting to undermine the regime co-exists.

And if I'm looking at a Biden administration or a future Trump administration, given that their focus is arms control and given my duties that the Iranian government will negotiate with whoever succeeds the presidency in 2020, November 2020, arms control is once again going to be front and center. And you will be told as Obama administration was told and Biden administration will tell itself, and maybe Trump administration will tell itself as well, in order to become – In order to crack the arms control agreement, you have to present yourself as a respectful, interlocutor to the other side. That you cannot ask the other side through foreclose nuclear facilities while also seeking to undermine the regime at the same time. I don't see those two things coming together in November 2020 in the United States. Also, the national context matters. Let's say a Biden administration's focus will be dealing with a pandemic, rehabilitating the economy and dealing with racial injustice issues.

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So, what they would want from the Middle East, what they would want from Iran, is no crisis. That leads me to believe that they will seek, but since I don't believe there's a permanent arms control agreement possible to the United States and Iran, but I do believe some intermittent agreements could be possible. Ship out your enriched uranium for this amount of sanctions, really, while the conversation continues. I could easily see that happening. So, the centrality and dominance of arms control, in my opinion, limit the possibility of a more aggressive approach to Iran. Wendy Sherman used to begin every conversation with the Iranians, trying to get their confidence by suggesting we are not after a regime change. John Bolton, as National Security Advisor essentially said, "We are not after a regime change. In this article of faith in the United States diplomatic corridors, that if you want to successfully negotiate an agreement with the Iranian regime, you have to essentially recognize the legitimacy of that in combination.

MEMARSADEGHI: But Reagan didn't do that. Reagan didn't do that. Reagan called them an evil empire and negotiated about the nuclear program about arms and weapons and everything at the same time. I mean, we had – hat's our big precedent, isn't it? Isn't that our big historical example?

TAKEYH: You're absolutely correct. There was not a single conversation between George Schulz and his counterparts when the issue of human rights didn't come up. What I'm trying to suggest is that the Soviet model has never been applied to negotiations or us control negotiations with Iran. And –

MEMARSADEGHI: If you –

TAKEYH: I'm skeptical –

MEMARSADEGHI: You should be.

TAKEYH: It should, but hasn't been-

MEMARSADEGHI: And, one of the – I think one of the things that would be great for Americans to have in common with Iranians, is that for them to see, for them all to see that everybody knows the regime is a lie. The regime officials know they're lying, the people of Iran know they're lying, just like the Soviet officials knew they were lying. And the people of the Soviet Union knew that the regime was lying. Let's call a spade, a spade. Don't sit with them and say, "You're all good, we want to keep you. There's no problem, other than the nuclear issue." There's a lot of problems in the Middle East that all come back to this regime. And America isn't being honest about it.

GERECHT: And let us remember historically that Reagan was, even in his own administration on many of these issues, the odd man out. So, you do have to have someone who has the bully pulpit and can use it well for that scenario to be somewhat plausible, I think on the Iran side. We have got about five more minutes folks, so I just wanted to – I want to go back to Eric on the issue of whether you could see any type of sustained clandestine policy by the United States, is that even important? And are allies really that important? Or really, we're talking about it's the United States that has to be that outside force. If I were to use the mafia parallel, it would be the FBI that has to come in here and apply the added assistance in, what realistically could we do if we are engaged in arms control? Do you see any way that you can do both at the same time?

EDELMAN: Well, Reuel, I'm the eternal optimist. So first, I think there might be more opportunity for building a bipartisan coalition, I know that sounds really Pollyanna-ish in the current climate as we're in the midst of a pretty brutal election campaign. But, if you assume for a second that, and judging by the poll data we have that are available today,

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that Vice President Biden is elected, and that the Democrats flipped the Senate. It's worth remembering that three very senior Democrats in the Senate voted against the JCPOA. Chuck Schumer, who will be the Senate Majority Leader in that scenario, Bob Menendez, who will probably be the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and his ranking member, Ben Cardin. There are other members of the Senate who, although they indicated they would vote, they never voted, so it's only an indication of how they were going to vote had the Obama administration actually submitted the agreement to the Senate.

But Cory Booker, if you read Senator Booker's, or if you watched his statement, I mean you would've thought he was going to say, "And for that reason I'm voting against this." I mean, it was a long bill of indictment against the Iranian regime. So that's point one. Point two, I think over the last four years, there has been an increasing, on both sides of the aisle, concern about authoritarian regimes waging political warfare against the United States. And that's using information operations, other kinds of tactics to essentially exploit our divisions in the United States and to make it harder for us to execute a policy dealing with those regimes. And so, I don't think it's out of the question that people might come to the conclusion that in dealing with these regimes, we have to use, as Secretary Gates likes to say, "All the tools in the toolbox that we have," and that includes both overt democracy assistance, as well as covert activity. Even if you wanted to get into a negotiation with Iran to improve the deal, you'd want them to be under pressure.

Now, some of the – I think there are a few more things we could do from sanctions to pressure the regime, but I think we're getting closer and closer to sort of diminishing returns on sanctions. And FDD, by the way, deserves enormous credit for all the work they've done on figuring out the most ingenious ways to crank up the economic pressure on the regime. But I do think there's some more to be done there, and we talked about some of that in our article, but I think we may be reaching the end of that. What other kind of pressures could we put on? Well, the regime is very susceptible, and the Shah's regime is, as Ray documented in his forthcoming book to be published by Yale University Press about the demise of the Shah, that defection essentially of large segments of the working class in Iran, particularly in the oil fields and transport industry, helped bring down the regime.

Now in the last several years in Iran, we've had strikes by transport workers, bus drivers, by rail workers, teachers, unions, sugarcane workers, and we ought to be – We've done that before, we knew how to support solidarity in Poland under the Reagan administration, and we have a history of that. Bipartisan started under the Truman administration in Western Europe when the Soviets were very aggressive there in the late '40s and '50s. I know I'm dating myself.

GERECHT: You're making my old case officer heart go "pitti, pitti, pat" though I must say I'm somewhat confused on how we might do it now, but it's certainly worth trying. I think we're about ready to close here, so I just wanted to, well, thank Eric for that excellent summation, thank Ray, and thank Mariam for participating in this. I think we actually did flesh out the excellent article a bit. And, inshallah, may optimism triumph. So, thank you.

TAKEYH: I just want to conclude by thanking FDD for providing this forum.

GERECHT: Well thank you. We'll end it here.