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FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION

... a Quaker lobby in the public interest

June 1, 2009

Dear Senator:

We write to call your attention to the attached article from Israel's *Jerusalem Post* reporting the views of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's former Iran analyst, Keith Weissman, on how best to counter the threat of Iran's nuclear activities.

Weissman believes that there is no viable military option for dealing with the Iranian nuclear threat. "The only viable solution is dialogue," he says. "Without a doubt, talking with Iran will be very difficult and frustrating, but there are no other viable options."

We at the Friends Committee on National Legislation believe that the views Weissman expresses in the article are persuasive arguments supporting President Obama's policy toward Iran. We urge you, too, to support U.S. diplomatic outreach to Iran without the coercion of new sanctions and without artificial deadlines.

A military attack, Weissman argues, would likely do no more than setback Iran's nuclear program and "unify Iranians behind an unpopular regime, ignite a wave of retaliation that would leave thousands dead from Teheran to Tel Aviv, block oil exports from the Persian Gulf and probably necessitate a ground war."

Weissman finds Israeli fears about an Iranian nuclear weapon understandable but believes that Iranian leaders "are not fanatics and they're not suicidal" and that Israel has the power to successfully deter any Iranian attack.

A resolution of the nuclear dispute with Iran will have to include a peaceful Iranian nuclear energy program subject to international inspection, he concludes, and an Iran integrated into an "overarching security architecture" for the region that also includes Israel and the Arab states.

Weissman was AIPAC's Iran analyst until April 2005 when the U.S. charged him and then AIPAC policy director Steve Rosen with espionage for allegedly passing a U.S. Iran policy directive to Israel. Charges against Weissman and Rosen were dropped last month. Weissman's well-informed and reasoned analysis deserves your careful attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Fine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jim Fine
Legislative Secretary,
Foreign Policy

Washington Watch: Ex-AIPACer: There is no military option in Iran

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull&cid=1242212417034>

May. 19, 2009

Douglas Bloomfield , THE JERUSALEM POST

There is no viable military option for dealing the Iranian nuclear threat, and efforts by the Israeli government and its supporters to link that threat to progress in peace with the Palestinians and Syria are "nonsense" and an obstacle to the Arab-Israeli and international cooperation essential to changing Iranian behavior.

That's the conclusion of Keith Weissman, the Iran expert formerly at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), speaking publicly for the first time since the government dropped espionage charges against him and his colleague, Steve Rosen, earlier this month.

There's no assurance an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities - even if all of them could be located - would be anything more than a temporary setback, Weissman told me. Instead, a military strike would unify Iranians behind an unpopular regime, ignite a wave of retaliation that would leave thousands dead from Teheran to Tel Aviv, block oil exports from the Persian Gulf and probably necessitate a ground war, he said.

"The only viable solution is dialogue. You don't deal with Iran with threats or preaching regime change," said Weissman, who has lived in Iran, knows Farsi (as well as Arabic, Turkish and French) and wrote his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago on Iranian history. That's where the Bush administration went wrong, in his view.

"President Bush's demand that Iran halt all nuclear enrichment before we would talk with the regime was an excuse not to talk at all," Weissman said. "And the administration's preaching of regime change only made the Iranians more paranoid and told them there was no real desire to engage them, only demonize them. The thing they fear most is American meddling in their internal politics."

HE SAID PRESIDENT Barack Obama is right to make it clear that regime change is not our goal. "Without that assurance we can't begin any dialogue or hope to be able to do anything about their nuclear program. Without a doubt, talking with Iran will be very difficult and frustrating, but there are no other viable options."

AIPAC has been the driving force on Capitol Hill for a get-tough policy, pushing through Congress a series of sanction bills, and Weissman was the lobby's expert on the topic.

"All along the idea was that sanctions were a bargaining chip to be traded for something tangible," he said. "We never opposed America and Iran talking to each other about these issues. However, the US strategy should have been directed at the supreme leader; he's the guy at the top and the one who makes the important decisions, not politicians like presidents Khatami or Ahmadinejad."

Weissman said Israel's worries about Iran getting a nuclear weapon are understandable, but despite some of the rhetoric coming out of Teheran, the Iranian leaders "are not fanatics and they're not suicidal. They know that Israel could make Iran glow for many years." He was referring to reports that Israel may have 200 or more nuclear weapons as well as the missiles and aircraft for devastating retaliation.

He believes Iran has the know-how to build a nuclear device, but he doubts it's made the final decision to go ahead with it. Iran may be "a few years or more" away from having an actual weapon and the means for accurate delivery.

"However, they would be crazy to test a weapon," he said. "That would essentially unite the world against them. Right now we can't get Russia and China to seriously help us deal with Iran, but if the Iranians tested a weapon, that would change in a flash. I don't think the Iranians are that stupid."

THE ARAB STATES, especially in the Gulf, are at least as worried as Israel about Iran's nuclear ambitions, and they should all be working together to deal with it, Weissman said, "but because nothing is moving on the Palestinian problem, there can't be any overt and probably little if any covert cooperation."

Trying to separate the issues, even refusing to endorse the two-state approach, "is part of the sophistry of people like [Binyamin] Netanyahu who want to avoid confronting the peace process," he said. "Iran's ability to screw around in the Israel-Arab arena would be severely impaired by pressing ahead on the Palestinian and Syrian tracks instead of looking for excuses not to."

"We're going to have to end up accepting some kind of peaceful Iranian nuclear energy program - and they actually need it; it's already too late to stop it entirely. That's why it is so important to establish a relationship with Iran in which they accept international inspection and obey international law," he said. "For that to happen, there has to be a discussion of some overarching security architecture for the region that includes both Israel and the Arabs, but before that can even be considered there has to be Arab-Israel reconciliation."

The end of his long legal nightmare also ended Weissman's public silence, and now that he's out from under AIPAC's anti-media paranoia, he feels free to express his own views for the first time in a decade.

What's next for Weissman? "I don't know. I couldn't seriously look for work with this case hanging over my head."