

CCG-CAG

Document approved for release
by U.S. Central Command. See
FOIA Case #07-0222

15 June 2005

MEMORANDUM THRU CG XO

FOR General Abizaid

SUBJECT: IFPA Conference Summary

1. Purpose: To provide the CG with a main participant synopsis of the three panel discussions of the CENTCOM sponsored, IFPA run, 26 May Conference titled, "Opportunities and Challenges in U.S. Middle East Policy."
2. CAG developed the conference format and questions which guided and stimulated discussion among the panelists and audience. ADM Moeller served as the senior CENTCOM representative and co-hosted the conference with Dr. Jacquelyn Davis of IFPA. His questions to the conference attendees and their responses are also enclosed.
3. Conference General Themes and Comments (compiled by J5 and CAG):

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4. We held three sessions, with the kick off speakers starting the discussion, followed by insights and commentary by conference participants.

Session 1's main discussion points: The Bush Administration's grand strategy, regional security, and stability planning for the Middle East after Iraq's elections.

Kick off speakers were Richard Perle (AEI), Danielle Pletka (AEI), and Henry D. Sokolski, (NPEC).

Perle's main points:

- The situations we're addressing today are linked. Can't solve Iraq without progress in Iran and Syria, and money still flows from Saudi Arabia.
- Expectations are high. The President has embraced democracy for the region and has repeated this goal frequently, identifying this goal specifically with democratic movements in Iran. This has an effect in the region.

Iraq

- In Iraq, we are finally on the right side of solving a problem partly of our own making. Self government for Iraq is good and the extended occupation was a tragic mistake. We could and should have turned things over to the Iraqi's quicker. We didn't trust them. The people that returned to Iraq (Chalabi, etc.) were alleged to have "no credibility" in Iraq, but now they have been elected and are running the country.
- Security and reconstruction are key. Reconstruction is struggling due to lack of security. We must avoid thinking only ex-Baathists can run security. Former Baathists are not very competent, that is a myth. The CIA favors using old Baathist intel establishment and this is a mistake.

Iran

- Iran has a miserably unpopular regime. Regime change is possible but won't happen automatically. I spoke with a student leader on phone yesterday; I don't know how

successful they can be, but we can and should support them. Expectations among these groups are that we will help them.

- It is hard to overstate the unpopularity of the Iranian government. Clerics are shunned in public, thought of as corrupt. We can do a great deal to support opposition, such as more external broadcasting into the country and finding ways to help Iranians communicate with one another.
- We need to be careful how much we focus on WMD. Just dealing with WMD gives the impression that if WMD is solved, then all will be good in US-Iran relations. That's not true, regime change is best way to solve WMD.

Syria/KSA

- In Syria, **Assad is no more a reformer than he is forced to be**. He was shocked by popular reaction in Lebanon. Events in Lebanon were supported by events in Afghanistan, Iraq and U.S. presence in region. Syrian opposition exists, both inside and outside the country.
- Saudi Arabia continues to provide huge funding for the extremists globally. They are building mosques staffed by extremists all over the world. Through these actions, they have done a disservice to themselves and to the world. We should be careful to acknowledge that to the extent they are doing things now which help in the GWOT, it is only because the Saudis themselves feel more openly in danger.
- We need to be careful who we think of as moderate in the Islamic world. The Saudis used to be typical moderates in the U.S. discussion.
- The Bush administration lacks a grand strategy. Coherent strategy is frustrated by a lack of cohesion in U.S. government departments. There are large differences between State, DOD, CIA and NSC. **Elements of strategy exist, in part based on the president's own instincts and goals, but these have not yet been woven into a cohesive whole.** Condi Rice is doing a great job and moving in the right direction. Now that she is at State, interagency differences are diminished. If the grand strategy ends up reflecting the Bush vision against terrorism, we will be doing the right thing.

Sokolski

- We (Republicans) make sharp distinctions about friends and enemies. The problem is, friends and enemies change. We need a more sophisticated approach to dealing with global and regional proliferation problems.
- How we handle the spread of WMD is central to how we deal with the Gulf, Middle East and SW Asia. Focus on Iran is very important, but risks becoming a repeat of North Korea in the 1990s. **Unfortunately, there is a severe bifurcation in policy on Iran – the debate is starkly between whether Iran should be bombed or coddled.**
- The DOS legal team and Iranian Foreign Ministry agree on a lot. It is dangerous what they agree on. They both agree a country in compliance with the NPT can come right up to the edge of building nuclear weapons. This is a misreading of the rules. Right now, both sides agree on what is safeguardable. They say if a site is monitored, we can prevent its switch to weapons. This is not true; if true we would let them have full nuclear fuel cycle. Plants can be turned over to weapons production overnight, materials can be turned into weapons even quicker. Nuclear material that loses its accountability can be easily misused.
- Iranians have pushed these points of agreement and the US has kept quiet and changed the subject to compliance. Republicans have focused on compliance better than others in the past. Past administrations have bent rules to keep people happy.

- If nuclear weapons spread, we may be pushed out of the Middle East because our friends may move to get WMD. Or the Iranians may pressure our allies to cut off U.S. access to their territory.
- We have not recognized the need to get back to the rules. We need to isolate and make an example of North Korea and Iran as violators and avoid treating them as equals. Republicans need restraint in spreading civil nuclear capabilities.

Binnendijk

- I agree on goals with Iran. U.S. involvement may not help, even though U.S. is popular. **We should use power of non-violent resistance, as in Georgia and Ukraine recently and longer ago in East Europe. Iran is ready for that type of operation; it needs to have no U.S. fingerprints though.** Non-violent resistance may take a while, but the nuclear program is moving rapidly. If this pushes the U.S. to take action that may unify Iran and harm opposition.
- U.S. relations with allies are going well. We have solid agreement on Syria and Lebanon. We are also coordinating policy on negotiations with Iran. I'm skeptical how far negotiation can go, but at least we are together with our allies. We should see how far the alliance can go in the negotiations with Iran together.
- **In the current environment, potential for real progress on the MEPP exists. Even just a Gaza withdrawal will allow for progress and movement in the right direction. We need to take such progress and turn it into public diplomacy success to show the US is working toward peace.**
- We must be clear about the differences between buying time, pushing for behavior change, and pushing for regime change.
- We cannot allow others to follow the path of Iran or North Korea. The EU-3 think agreeing to nearly everything Iran wants is better than allowing a single major disagreement to end talks. We need to make it clear we aren't picking on one country, but we are enforcing rules globally. The French are actually doing this, saying rules should be followed everywhere. **Again, we cannot let Iran become a model for others as to how to successfully proliferate.**

Pletka

- Democracy is not a cookie cutter and the word is used liberally, but it is only shorthand for a whole collection of reforms. **Democracy is shorthand for representative government and political and economic reform.**
- Iran could willingly open and democratize under the mullahs, but realistically that would never happen because the theocrats know it would lead to their demise.
- On nonproliferation, we care less about nuclear weapons than about the countries that possess them because although democratic states may have nuclear weapons and we want to hew a tough line, at same time we all recognize those states (Israel and India) aren't proliferators and won't use nuclear weapons in a first strike. They are responsible caretakers.
- Finally, if given the choice, the Iranian (Persian) people may well opt for nuclear weapons no matter the costs; why should an ancient and historic civilization like Persia not have nuclear weapons, if India and China do? They may well ask, "Why is a free and democratic Iran not a responsible nuclear steward if Pakistan is accepted as such by default?"

Session 2's main discussion points: Iran and Syria: Assessing capabilities, intentions, and the prospects for new relationships with the United States.

Kick off speakers were Ken Pollack (Brookings), and Marius Deeb (John Hopkins- SAIS).

Pollack

- I'm going to focus on where Iran is going. We know Iran has a vast terrorist network, wants nuclear weapons and its conventional force is "garbage" but perhaps improving in some areas.
- Most importantly, Iran isn't monolithic, it is deeply fragmented. It's unclear in what policy direction Iran will go; it's a mistake to think of Iran as a unified actor.
- **The Iranian regime faces five obstacles. First is its economy.** The economy is a huge long term problem. Short term Iran has high oil revenue and investment from China and other countries, like India. Iranian economists realize they need more than the foreign oil investment, though.
- **The second obstacle is public opinion.** Most Iranians dislike the regime and this dislike stems from the huge economic problems creating unemployment and inflation.
- **Third is ideology.** The regime is ideological and was founded on a particular concept of how to govern and how to relate to the outside world. It is difficult for many in the Iranian ruling class to break with this ideology even though they see it is not working. Ideology is the source of legitimacy and cannot be abandoned without people asking why the Mullahs are ruling.
- **Fourth, Iran faces growing problems with the West.** Iran needs to find out if the EU-3 will stand up in the crunch. Iran is under more pressure from the Europeans than ever before.
- **Fifth, is the transformation of Iran's security environment.** It has changed a lot in just the last five year with the removal of the Taliban and Saddam and introduction of US troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. **The situation Iran faces with its transformed security environment is similar to the US situation in 1991.** We recognized the change in 1991 and instituted a comprehensive debate on how we should change US policy and strategy as a result. Iranians are having such a debate implicitly and piecemeal. This form of debate complicates things. Debates are disconnected and about different policy issues, but are all interlinked.
- **Beyond these obstacles is the issue of domestic politics.** There is interplay between the external policy of other states and the internal situation in Iran. The external can be a stimulus to the internal.
- There has been a split in Iran since the fall of Shah. This is currently shown in the slate of presidential candidates. There is a full slate from hardliners to pragmatists and reformers. The slate doesn't represent all people, but it has an enormous range. People thought the slate would be Khamenei's candidate and some long shots. The slate was far better than that. The slate will probably change before the election with some people being forced/pressured to drop out.
- Khamenei has emerged as very powerful, not Khomeini status, but Khamenei is comfortable with his power and believes he can dominate no matter who wins the presidential election. Today, whatever Khamenei decides will ultimately win the day. But it is very unclear what he wants to do. He used to seem like a pragmatist, but once he was appointed Supreme Leader he moved to a harder line. He protects himself against

hardliners because if he is thrown out of office it won't be by reformers or moderates, but rather by the theocratic ideologues.

Iran and the Future

- **Three possible policies can occur.** The first two are dependant on the Europeans. As long as the Europeans show backbone, that creates a problem for Iran.
- **The first possible policy is Iran doing the right thing and cooperating with the West (i.e., “pulling a Libya”) to some degree. This is a real possibility.** I agree that if you put to the Iranian people the choice between nuclear weapons or economic prosperity, they will probably overwhelmingly choose the latter. In the past, Khamenei has been able to avoid making this choice because the Europeans have been feckless. The EU-3 may force this decision, assuming they remain resolute, although this is not guaranteed. If the Europeans hang tough it is more likely the Iranians will chose the economy over nuclear weapons.
- **The second possible policy is Iran not backing down.** Iran may decide they will grin and bear the sanctions that have been threatened. This will be tough for Iran because old Iranian allies are gone; Sudan and Libya won't support Iran anymore. Syria and the Palestinian's support are a question. Iran in this case would likely look desperately to China for economic, political and military leverage, but it seems unlikely that China will carry water for Iran.
- **The last policy option assumes the Europeans cave. Khamenei will be very relieved because he will have avoided the tough choice between the economy and nuclear program.** In this scenario, Iran's problems will not have been solved, and the five obstacles will mostly remain. They will win time, though. This scenario would result in effectively the current policy choice, but Iran can continue to go slow. It can wait to see how events unfold in Iraq and Afghanistan. It also will not need to push against sanctions, and can move forward on its nuclear program.

Deeb

- Syria defines itself as a regional actor. It has two distinct dimensions: pan-Arabism and militant Shiaism. Hafez Assad took power in the name of the pan-Arab Baathist ideal in order to appeal to the Arab majority (Sunnis).
- **But relations between Syria and Iran are stronger than any strategic alliance because they have religion in common.** The close relationship with Iran allows Syria to move between militant Shiaism and pan-Arab militarism.
- Syria and Iran share many similar policies. Syria and Iran have the same agenda in Lebanon. Hezbollah was always a joint venture. But Syria does leave open the chance for a MEPP, Iran does not.
- Terrorism is now an integral part of the Assad regime. **The notion that Assad will give up terrorism is a mirage.**
- **Iraq gives Syria opportunities.** US is battling Sunni insurgency supported by Syria, but which Syria ultimately wants to see lose. **Militant Shiites will prevail in Iraq once the US leaves, they may even be prevailing now. Syria quietly wanted the US to go to war in Iraq to bleed the Sunnis.** Syria allows insurgents to operate from its territory, yes, but ultimately Syria favors militant Shiites. But by supporting Sunni insurgents, Assad earns legitimacy in pan-Arab circles. After withdrawal from Lebanon, militant Shiaism is now more important to Syria. Syria has not lost Lebanon totally, it is still playing “the game” there through surrogates and proxies.

- **Best scenario for Assad is to implement only economic reforms.** Political reforms will end his regime, so that is unacceptable to him. **The maximum he will permit is to allow political opponents to speak.**
- Syria's WMD is terrorism even though it has chemical weapons. Nuclear weapons would be useless against Israel. **Iran and Syria both will not give up terrorism. They both thrive on conflict.** By being in favor of conflict they stay in power because they are unpopular and can deflect attention from their domestic failings.
- Syria wants to rid Middle East of US presence. The idea that either the Iranian or Syrian regime will change behavior is unlikely and it definitely won't happen in Syria. Contrary to most opinion, Assad is experienced. He was trained by his father for 6 years. He follows his father's pattern. The assassination of Hariri was in his father's pattern.
- **The worst scenario for US is prolonged insurgency in Iraq. Regardless, Syria and Iran will eventually win, once the US eventually leaves.**

Session 3's main discussion points: Implication for U.S. Security Planning and Interagency Collaboration

Kick off speaker was the Honorable Doug Feith (DoD), followed later by Mike Eisenstadt.

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Eisenstadt

- On democracy promotion, it's an ideal goal, but unrealistic to expect political considerations will be absent. So a country-neutral approach may be difficult. Pressure will be placed on different places in different amounts. Democracy will be a stick against enemies and we will tread lightly with allies and partners. A democratic Iran will probably be more responsible with nuclear weapons, but newly democratic states may also be more prone to aggressive behavior.
- **On public diplomacy, Tehran has turned this issue to their advantage by pressing their right to nuclear technology.** If we make it clear nuclear weapons will mark the death knell of political reform, it may change the Iranian peoples' opinion. **We can then transform the Iranian nuclear program from a rallying cry to a wedge issue.**
- Non-kinetic options should be considered to make it clear to Iran that nuclear weapons will result in a much more difficult security environment for them. **We have to make it clear to them that the further they go down the nuclear road, the more we are going to do to create an effective regional security architecture around them as a counter-weight.** We need to leverage CDI and SC planning to this end. Look at boosting counter-mine and ASW capabilities of GCC states. Also, we may realistically need to look at giving Gulf states their own independent, conventional short-range deterrent capabilities.
- On Syria, weeks ago I would have said there is no way they will leave Lebanon. But they did leave without much game playing or stalling. Surprising, but we need to watch carefully.

Admiral Moeller's Closing Questions and Selected Responses:

ADM Moeller

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Duelfer

- We need to extend the frame of reference over the long term. Saddam faced regime change and the need to disarm. It is not lost on regional states that when Saddam had WMD, he was in power. When he didn't have WMD, he was invaded.

- Tariq Aziz said that with a security relationship and dialogue with the United States, Iraq would give up WMD and “be our best friend” in the region. Other Iraqi officials said similar things. This shows that dialogue can be a valuable reward.
- With Israel and Iran both nuclear, US regional forces will be very vulnerable. Our basing structure in Iraq will affect Iran’s calculations. We need to think of calculations from Iran’s point of view and over the long term.

ADM Moeller

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McMillan

- With Iran, most policies discussed have high probability of failure. We have lots of interests we don’t even consider. The “threat that we will cripple your economy if you don’t cooperate” policy has little credibility. Iraqi sanctions were the most crippling ever and the Iraqis never caved. The logic was that Saddam should have caved and proved to our satisfaction that they had nothing. That logic failed. Why Iran would cave under lesser sanctions is tough to figure out.
- Threatening Iran may harm GWOT by harming public diplomacy. Even if Iranians like US, other Arabs see the threats against Iran as more US antagonism towards the Muslim world. That will harm our efforts in the GWOT. Moeller’s suggestions are more likely to work. Let’s leverage divisions in Iran. We need to be more nuanced/subtle or risk blowback.

Grimmett

- We don’t understand the dynamics of the Syrian regime. Syrians also don’t understand what’s happening in DC. This makes the chance of an accident high. Engaging the Syrians is a nonstarter in DC politically. There is a risk we will push Syria to become a failed state. With a chaotic Iraq and a failed Syria, it increases the terrorist base.
- Hezbollah disarming is a nonstarter. All factions in Lebanon are armed, so Hezbollah cannot realistically disarm under current conditions. The notion that other groups disarmed in the 1990s was political theater.

Deeb

- Opposition in Lebanon wants Hezbollah to join Lebanese army, if it keeps its weapons. France is more likely to be asked to train army than US. Hezbollah will be shocked if we offer to train them because of terrible history between US and Hezbollah. They don’t want to talk to us, like Iranians didn’t want to talk in the past. They will be suspicious and think we are trying to harm them.

McMillan

- In the past, when we said we would talk to Iran, we said they had to give up their nuclear program, terrorism and anti-MEPP stance. Iran replied with demands of their own. Due to this, we never spoke until war in Afghanistan. There are areas in which it would help to speak to them. But it would require no preconditions – on either side.

Makovsky

- Southern Lebanon is a flashpoint. Hezbollah is sitting on 12,000 rockets that can hit not only Haifa, but maybe Tel Aviv. This has to factor into Israeli thinking regarding Iran, and also must be in the back of the US mind, whatever we may decide to do vis-à-vis Tehran.

- Power vacuum in southern Lebanon should be a priority for CENTCOM. Creating US-Lebanese mil-to-mil contact can help get the Lebanese army into the southern vacuum. In a crisis that control will be helpful.
- **If you assume Iran will go nuclear, then Israeli support for a US Israel defense treaty shifts. Previously Israel has hesitant because a treaty may tie Israel's hands. Some Israelis are already calling for a treaty. Others say that a nuclear Iran is not inevitability so we (Israelis) shouldn't plan a defense treaty assuming Iran is already nuclear.**
- Islamists may increasingly play it both ways, like Sinn Fein/IRA. We should warn publics of the consequences of militant Islamic political activity ahead of time. We should say if Hezbollah or Hamas win an election, then it will affect your relations with the US.

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CAG