DEFENSE FORUM FOUNDATION
Congressional Defense and Foreign Policy Forum

“Iran Uprising:
Prospects for Regime Change in 2018”

Speaker:
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Introduction:
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Rayburn House Office Building, Capitol Hill
Washington, D.C.
Friday, March 16, 2018, 12:00 noon

SUZANNE SCHOLTE: Hello I am Suzanne Scholte, President of Defense Forum Foundation. It’s my pleasure to welcome you to our Congressional Defense and Foreign Policy Forum. I wanted to mention for those who are coming for the first time, the DFF forums were established back in the 1980s for the purpose of bringing expert speakers to Capitol Hill in a non-partisan environment, in order to hear about critical national security issues. And today, we are going to be focusing on Iran, which in the words of today’s speaker, is “at the heart of radical Islam.” Our last program featured Dr. Peter Pry and focused on the electronic magnetic pulse threat and how vulnerable our country was to that threat and we were really pleased after that forum, there was so much more attention on that very subject, Congressional hearings and major stories. So I’m hoping that after today, because of this very critical national security topic we will see that kind of response and reaction to this topic today. We are very honored to have Dr. Majid Sadeghpour, a leading human rights activist, particularly in the Iranian human rights movement. He serves as the Political Director for the Organization of Iranian-American Communities. He personally suffered after the 1979 revolution; his family faced persecution, his brother was executed by the regime. Fortunately he was able to escape Iran, and became very successful in the medical profession here in America. But he could not forget the people he left behind, he could not forget the suffering that was happening in Iran. So, he became extremely active in this movement so much so that I thought he was doing this work full time, but he was actually working full time as well maintaining as profession career. He has written extensively on this issue and he has been featured in many television, radio and online programs, speaking out about what is
happening in Iran.

He warned decades ago that Khomeini and his disciples were implementing an evil interpretation of Islam into every aspect of life in Iran. “With deliberate plans,” he warned, “for extraterritorial expansions”. He warned more recently that “as free societies grapple how best to contain the deceptively sudden growth of fundamentalist Islam and Islamic States in particular, Khomeini’s blueprint seems all but forgotten.”

We are so grateful to have this champion who has dedicated his life to speaking out for the people of Iran to help them achieve their fundamental human rights. He is going to discuss -- it is a heavy, heavy topic -- but he is the perfect person to talk about it, what is the current situation in Iran as we see growing protests from all levels of society, what are the prospects for change in Iran, and how the free world should respond to this. It is my great honor to introduce Dr. Majid Sadeghpour.

DR. MAJID SADEGHPOUR: I am honored and humbled by the introduction. Thank you all for being here, thank you to the Defense Forum Foundation for inviting me, and for you all who have joined us, Members of Congress and their staffs, who have joined us here today.

As Dr. Scholte mentioned so kindly, I have the honor of working in the community to try to enlighten and inform, better said, so that there will be better US policy decisions regarding Iran. In addition, I have tried to raise a family and live a normal life to the extent that is possible, one that I dearly miss having had the opportunity to live, in my original place of birth, Iran.

Having said that, I am going to try to walk you through, as Dr. Scholte mentioned, a heavy topic. It is rather complicated as Iran is a diverse, multi-ethnic, historic place with significant social, economic and political dynamics. Its population is well-educated. Iran as a nation has always remained whole, in large part because of its ancestry and history, but also its topography and so forth. It is very difficult to invade militarily, it is very difficult to tear its nationalism apart, and so people hence have this backbone if you may, this semi-arrogance if you may. But it is not really rooted in arrogance; it is rooted in history, and a sense of honor and pride that keeps them together. This is the framework within which I hope I can continue this conversation I am having with you today.

Now, I put these two pictures here for you to provide you some context for what the discussion will be today. I am sure most of you have seen the picture below. It was in the cover of *New York Times* in the early days of this year, 2018. The article was about the revolutionary guards warning that there would be wholesale killings in the street if people continued their protests, defied authorities, and remained on the streets. This picture is taken just outside Tehran University, I believe, because I recognize the background, the framework of the front of Tehran University. The picture you probably have not seen is the one in the upper portion of the screen, from June 1980. My brother was in that crowd somewhere protesting against the clerical regime in Iran I remember had would have many struggles with my dad, as he would warn my father about the dangers of fundamentalist Islam. Now, let’s just get a feel for 1980, who then was worried about fundamentalist Islam? My brother was subsequently tortured and spent years, beyond the years he was supposed to have been imprisoned, and executed with many others during the 1988 massacre of political prisoners somewhere, nearly 29 years ago. My family never saw his body, his bones, nothing.

With the benefit of this background, let me begin the conversation regarding Iran. Let’s begin with the current situation in Iran. In latter part of December 2017, the early part of January and February 2018, we witnessed nationwide uprisings in Iran. Most of us have seen pictures and articles that were pretty clear on that. What was the difference between this uprising and 2009 uprising some called the “Green Revolution”? Well first, the scope and the makeup. There were near simultaneous protests in 142 cities across Iran. There
may be discussions whether it was 142 cities, *The Wall Street Journal* may call it 90 cities or 97 cities, nevertheless 100, 110, 120, 130 cities across Iran. The population rose up just about the same time, and within two hours the *slogans changed* from economy to those we seen on the screen here, at the minimum those: within two hours, the slogans in those cities were “Down with Khamenei, Down with Rouhani”, “Conservative, Reformer, the Game is over”. That, ladies gentlemen, is a demand for regime change. That’s not me saying it, that’s not America saying it, that’s what the people of Iran are saying. They want a wholesale change in the makeup of Iran’s political system. “Leave Syria alone, tend to our grievances.” Why is this significant? I will discuss this more later. The slogans, like I’ve said, changed in a couple of hours. That explains why the Iranian regime had to cut off access to the internet. That explains its desire, its almost desperation, to cut off communication among the organized resistance of the people of Iran.

I want to give you a parallel. Let’s say I want to make three demonstrations in this very area, let’s say here at Dupont Circle in Washington, DC, and then one in Fairfax Circle, VA. Do you know how much work that takes? Really! To have the slogans, to have the communications like that. This is a free society at that, and to gather people like that would take so much organization. But keep in mind, in Iran you die for saying those words. How are people able to get into the streets in that many cities? On the streets? Forget the willingness to come up front, forget the underlying reasons, but the fact that it occurred, not one day, not two days, but for nearly two months! And social class is also important. The people who protested were supposed to be the bedrock of the regime: the working poor. What happened? What happened to the regime that supposedly is so powerful that it is flexing its muscles in Syria and Iraq and Lebanon? Why is it so shaky among its own pillars?

To better understand where we are today, let us see what fundamentalism is and perhaps build on what we can do in the future.

The Iranian opposition movement, which I am a proud – I should not say member -- but I should say ‘volunteer’, a humble volunteer of that -- believes that there is an innate inability of fundamentalism to actually take popular root in society. This is because their ideals are based on these five pillars.

Number one is their use of “coercive religion.” Forceful religion. The first active Ayatollah’s action, their very first legislative and legally binding act as ordered by the fundamentalist regime of Iran was to force the hijab (mandatory veiling and female dress code). There literally used one bullet to kill two enemies. First – suppressing women, who are the engine for progress and change in Iran (and for really for any democracy). No democracy thrives without women’s rights. We know that. Liberal democracies in the West have found that out. And yet Ayatollahs did it with the forced hijab in one sweep. The second thing they did was to tell the people, “if you don’t, we’ll kill you.” And they did. That is why the biggest protests in early days of the revolution were by women. And today, the leadership of the main Iranian opposition is women. Not accidently, but based on the need for bringing democratic change to Iran. Women leadership is necessary because, fundamentalists Islamist entities need oppression and subjugation of women to survive.

Second, the *establishment of what we call the Caliphate*. The Caliphate, or in Iran, what is called ‘velayat-e faqih’. ‘Velayat-e faqih’ is what Khomeini was and Ali Khamenei is. To them, the ‘velayat-e faqih,’ is the representative of God on earth, the self-anointed representative of God. So, that person holds the authority over every person on the face of the planet, not just the people of Iran. I don’t have time, unfortunately, to go into so many details of how perverse that is, but I will just have to move on.
Third pillar of fundamentalist Islamic ideology is use of *terrorism and an insane craving for power*. Think of ISIS, as we think through these things, the latter is an existential need for this entity.

Fourth is a *disregard for international borders*. To the Ayatollahs, Iran is just the safe haven. A safe house from which to do what they have always wanted to do, which is exporting and, expanding their belief system, and their medieval ideology. If you have a question about why and if that is true, just look at what they are doing in Iraq and Syria when the people of Iran are starving. The oil-reach nation of Iran is starving, believe it or not. People, many workers, day in and day out, have not gotten paid for six months, or even a year. I’m not talking about daily laborers, I am talking about engineers. My wife’s younger brother is a civil engineer and has not gotten paid in six months. These folks in the middle class have some reserves, they can hold on. And we’ll talk about that fragileness going forward.

Fifth pillar of Islamic fundamentalists is their reliance on misogyny and degrading Women’s Status. Now, misogyny: Perhaps one of the most important aspects of what Ayatollahs did was instituting misogyny and forcing the hijab, and the subsequent systemic expansion of that form of thought within the fabric of society. This is necessary for them -- not only to suffocate any form of dissent within society or any change for the better -- but because women will be leading change, especially for a country like Iran. Such a system also makes women a commodity for their oppressive machine. What to give a man to entice him into your system? A gun, money, and a woman perhaps!! Well at least their brand of man.

So within this context, what is the possibility of change in Iran?

*Iran has had three significant uprisings/revolutions over the past hundred years.*

In 1906 they had the constitutional revolution. Coincidentally, women had a significant role in that movement. They carried guns in their chadors and carried them to the fighters so that it could be hidden from authorities.

In 1953, we had right smack in the middle of the Middle East, the Iranian people had a democratically elected government and a parliament that worked to respect the rights all parts of the society. Western fear of the Soviet Empire at that time, perhaps clouded our judgment, “our” meaning the United States, as to how we treated that Iranian government at the time. But unfortunately the United States and the Clinton administration served a U.S. apology to the very people who enabled the 1953-1954 coup d’è·tat that overthrew that government - to the Ayatollahs. The fundamentalist Ayatollahs should not have been the recipient of that apology. They didn’t want democracy in Iran, neither do they today, as demonstrated by what we see happening in Iran.

So Iranians have, over the past four decades - as that picture of the 1980 protest in Tehran confirms with alf million plus people in the streets of Tehran in June 1980, saying “*No to Khomeini.*”. Khomeini was the supreme leader of Iran, the ‘velayat-e faqih’ in Iran. Compare that what the slogans were this January.

The parallel to that would be half a million people on the streets of Bagdad, or somewhere in Syria – going and chasing al-Baghdadi out of their town. That’s what people of Iran tried to do in 1980. And for that, there was a massacre in Iran, without the advantage of twitter or another form of communication for people to let the rest of the world know what was going on.

The Regime has executed upwards of a hundred and twenty thousand people in Iran. And in the 1988 massacre of political prisoners, 30,000 people were killed, pulled out of their prison cells, where they had already been in jail for political reasons. These prisoners had committed no other act, but they were pulled out of their cells and just shot in the back yards of the prisons and buried at God knows where.

That is the entity, the mindset and knowhow, this ISIS, that is surviving in the modern day societies of our countries, and really pervasive around the globe. I think, the UN, for the first time in three decades, has included the 1988 massacre in its report; it’s annual report, which is a seismic shift, really.
The Prospects for Change in Iran are rooted in the fact that the regime is -- as is fundamentalism as a whole -- is diseased because it is not democratic. The regime in Iran is not rooted in its people. In Iran it is especially the case if you think about the 1906 and 1953 revolutions and the 1979 revolution was the same - the people of Iran wanted choice. The Shah of Iran was anointed, was not chosen by the people of Iran. The people of Iran wanted the ability to choose. They didn’t want the Shah nor do they want the self appointed Ayatollahs. The people of Iran wanted and still want the ability to choose their form of government. So to that end, 50, 60 percent of population of Iran is made up of women. They are the ones that are going to drive that change. The men of Iran, at the minimum, are not necessarily the motivators for change, because they have been for four decades somewhat the benefactors. I say this at a personal level and don’t mean for our Organization of Iranian American Communities saying that. I mean that I should own up to that comment, but I feel it is going to be very difficult for men to lead here.

So therefore, the women of Iran and hence the Iranian opposition is made primarily, their leadership, is primarily women. It has to be. And in these demonstrations that we saw in January and February, women had a significant role in organizing it. And today across Iran, the oil workers, the industries, the drivers, protests are continuing. And this regime is going to have to answer to that.

When we talk about regime change, we immediately hit a dead wall, as if in Iran, it is going to have to be like Iraq. But in the history of modern civilization, even in recent history, we have seen multiple examples to the contrary. Thomas Jefferson said it clearly, I thought of this and added this last night at the last minute because I heard Senator Joe Lieberman use it yesterday at our event at the Senate that we had for Iranian Nowruz. Jefferson said, “Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God.” Such resistance truly is seen in the fabric of Jewish religion, Muslim religion, Christianity, all monotheistic religions.

And so I thought it is worth adding in the context of what we are looking for. Additionally, the in American Revolution, what did George Washington do? Was he the first to start the American Revolution or want conflict? No. George Washington spent a significant amount of time, trying to come to terms with the British rulers, or whoever it was that was attempting to dictate the politics of this nation. And then he could no longer, and it is only then that he sought to oppose it with vigor, and he succeeded. And as we walk the halls of Congress here, we are riding on his shoulders.

Why is regime change bad when it’s done right? South Africa, for example. How did regime change occur in South Africa? Didn’t the rest of the world, at some point make a decision to agree and try to hold the hands of the people of South Africa, regardless of color, or ethnic, or belief systems?

When we decided to do that, the dynamics of South Africa changed. Tyranny has no chance, because it has no legitimacy.

So the new global reality is that mankind is beginning to realize that modern civilization is under threat from fundamentalist Islam, by seeing its impact on mankind. People are sometimes wondering about Salman Rushdie, and why that was, but people forget who ordered for Salman Rushdie to be killed. Does anybody know who Salman Rushdie is? Most of us who are grey haired who know him. What happened in Charlie Hebdo, and subsequently San Bernadino and other places where we saw the spread of terrorism, it’s only a copycat of what Khomeini ordered in 1984 or 1985, somebody remind me. Because Salman Rushdie, an author who still lives somewhere on this globe, wrote a book about Islam that Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran didn’t like. So he ordered the ‘fatwa’, that he must be killed. To this day, that stands. There’s a reward payable by an Iranian government check.
And you wonder why the spreading of fundamentalism occurs? Because somebody is giving that legitimacy.

But the regime in Iran, as with ISIS, and other entities alike are bankrupt. They are fragile because they survive through the barrel of guns, by coerciveness, and perversion. Perversion of all aspects of life: education, politics, military, economics, diplomatic realm, all of which Iranian government has utilized or perverted.

But the regime is bleeding inside Iran, and across the region. It is bleeding politically, it is bleeding economically, is bleeding financially. In all aspects of its life - it is bleeding in legitimacy. No longer can the Ayatollahs in Iran claim legitimacy anywhere.

Appeasement policies by some countries, however, are keeping the regime afloat. I don’t name them, but some countries still think and think they can get this black ugly cobra to lay an egg from which the beautiful dove flies off. It just won’t occur. This comparison is not mine but is by Maryam Rajavi, the Iranian resistance opposition leader. This is her example, so I borrowed it, hopefully with her permission. We can’t continue to do that, we cannot, this regime is intrinsically incapable of such a change, even within itself, forget what they do externally. These appeasement policies should end.

As I mentioned earlier, the ruling regime must go in its entirety. We have as human beings no other choice. This entity must end. Iranian people have an organized opposition. I exemplified that early, using the last example (protests), not to mention the1980. About half a million people can’t gather in the street just randomly in 1980. Their grievances and organizational capability never died. It is in the fabric of Iranian society. It is waiting for the right moment to engulf and burn this regime down. And we want to do it democratically, we don’t want a foreign intervention in Iran because we know it would fail, not only it would cost people’s lives, it would impose significant other costs to whoever is involved in that conflict.

Methods:

People want a peaceful end to this regime. I got a tweet, a response to a tweet I sent yesterday about an event yesterday. I got a response from a individual from the Arab world, whom I don’t know, who sent me a direct message, saying that if Syria is an example, this regime will not go easily. That’s his words, not mine. The fact is that what the regime does will ultimately determine what people will have to do, to get done what they got to get done. So the methods, I can’t predict what will happen. Nobody can. But we have the moral obligation to support the biggest resource we have in confronting the modern Islamic fundamentalism, the 80 million population of Iran that want it gone and have the capability to get it done.

More pressure on the regime is our 1,2, and 3s. This is not sugar coated. More pressure on the regime in all aspects of its power source.

Hold the regime accountable for what it has done in the past, i.e. 1988 massacre of political prisoners. H.Res.188 is one resolution that comes to mind in the United States Congress. Push back on Iran’s role in Iraq, in Syria, and everywhere else, really push back.

Holds its revolutionary guard accountable both financially economically and militarily, however we can. Put the weapons embargo on the regime of Iran.

Stop the regime from using the bank system to bankroll its massacres in Syria and beyond.

And then perhaps the most important point is providing moral support to the people of Iran so that they have hope. They are not fools. They don’t come to the street to overthrow the regime accidentally. No, they come with an organized methodology. But yet, for them to succeed in mass, for the middle class to join, yes economic hardship: my brother in law will come to the street. This economic pressure will be significant. He has to feed his little four year old daughter. But yet, when he decides, he ultimately wants to feed his family, keep his wife and children safe, as we all do. He will come to the street if he has the understanding, at least an Iranian will say that, that the dynamic is behind me, the global community is watching. The global community is going to be able to support me.
This population in the middle class can change the dynamic in Iran and will change the dynamic in Iran. And to your point Dr. Scholte, making available technology to the people of Iran so that they can communicate amongst themselves, so that Iranian regime is not able to simply cut off the internet, cut off telegram or this and that and be able to cut off the ability of people to organize.

We can do it, technologically we can, and morally we must do that. It is actually in the UN Charter; the free nations must prevent massacre and killing of people, free people.

**Recognize and engage the Iranian opposition.** There’s no hiding behind the fact that there is a popular Iranian opposition movement that has a platform, a ten point plan for the future of Iran, that to use Rudy Giuliani, Members of Congress, or Joe Lieberman’s words; are “something any liberal democrat or republican would embrace in this country.”

We need to continue to reflect the voices of the opposition. Voice of America, Radio Farda and others, Persian language ones especially, have recently begun to do that, and it is really to be appreciated. It has an impact. I grew up as a child listening to the Voice of America at the breakfast table, as a child, before the 1979 anti-monarch revolution. And I think they need to reflect not only these opposition movements, which are very, very organized and they have many channels internal or otherwise. They need to be given exposure.

The people of Iran will ultimately find the way to end this regime democratically without boots on the ground or blood of an American soldier being lost or shed. I thank you for listening to me, I apologize, I should say, for getting passionate, but as my background suggests, this is something that I live and breathe every day, and as I speak, I remember my background and I hope to keep the voices of those oppressed in Iran who can’t speak for themselves alive. Thank you for listening. I appreciate it.

(Applause)

**Scholte:** We’re going to open up the floor to the questions now, and if you could just raise your hand, stand up and say the office you are with or the organization you are with, anybody that has a question?

**Dr. Sadeghpour:** Please.

**Joel Starr:** Joel Starr, US Institute of Peace. Speaking on behalf of myself, not the institution. But what is your view with regard of pros and cons in staying at Iran nuclear deal?

**Dr. Sadeghpour:** Iran nuclear deal, we were talking about earlier before the event. Iran nuclear deal is a manifest reality as of today. We are of the position that it needs to, and should be strengthened to the extent that it is possible, the western civilization has the leverage to do it, and must utilize that leverage. Beyond and in addition to strengthening it, we have to hold Iran accountable for every component of this agreement, both written and intrinsic within the agreement. That includes what it does to the human rights. So relative to the confines of JCPOA, distrust and verify, strengthen to it, if you can. It is our humble opinion that you can if you push harder.

**Merc Fox:** Merc Fox from Federal Research Division, CRS, and I have a question with two parts to it. What ministries or areas of regime are still popular with the working poor and also the same question for the middle class?

**Dr. Sadeghpour:** So, let me, that’s a complicated question but I will do my best. I don’t profess to have lived in Iran in last year, or last month. But I, let me give you just a general idea of that popularity thought, and then maybe build on why my argument was that I just articulated. I used to go for my dental braces to Tehran. They were very expensive in Iran in 1980s. But I used to get in a car, a chartered car in a small city in northern Iran, every month I had to go up there to Tehran, get dropped off at the bus station. Then I would hop in these taxis, after taxi, so I could get to northern part of Tehran, where my Boston University graduated dentistry office was. It was a huge office, it was five times the size of this room. And there were beautiful girls working as hygienists. Always loved to go there as a teenager. So that said, in these multiple buses and taxis, well, my father was fairly, upper middle class, so we could afford to do that. Not everybody
could now afford to get taxies like I did then. And in taxies in Iran, not one person seats. Often times, the guy stops and picks up other people. And as a teenager, I witnessed countless times, countless times. We picked up mullah, a mullah means somebody with authority, we picked up rich person, poor person, picked up anybody on the way, and we dropped them off and picked up the next person. So I would, it was almost like a social gathering before I got to where I needed to go, way on the other side - from east Tehran to all the way to the northwest Tehran. And in these conversations, I happened to learn some of the things that I talked about today. Not that I was a part of the conversation, I was just listening.

And I can tell you from the Mullah to the poor fella, none of them wanted this regime. Not one, from the taxi cab driver, no one had popularity for, or wanted this regime. When I say this, I was a sophomore in high school. Fast forward to hundred twenty thousand deaths, Universities were prisons and all aspects of life in Iran are affected by those five fundamentals I referred to. They are systemic within the fabric of Iranian government system; education, even the religion, politics, economy, transportation, every aspect of this regime has gotten the hallmarks, those five hallmarks in it.

A woman can’t look for a job in any ministry of Ayatollahs without being asked to do a favor. It is disgusting in a predominantly Muslim society. It is a perversion of the religion. It is the perversion of Persian culture. It is a perversion of humanity. In describing the predicament of the Iranian people, my colleague Alex, often refers to it this way and I picked up and use it here with your permission, sir. Alex says that Iranians have previously witnessed freedoms - like a bird, enable to fly. You know what it is like, you know how high you can get, you know where you can seat, and you know where you can find food. And then somebody grabs you, shoves you in this cage, and closes the door. And says, “This is your new reality.” So regardless of which ministry Ayatollahs have, I would say the closest, the ministries to intelligence and security, the tighter they reign, and certainly the farther you get from the security, the less popular, perhaps, If you may. But coerciveness is in every aspects of Iranian life. So the Iranian people, given a choice, will choose anything remotely similar to this regime. The regime, these guys are ISIS. Simple as that, with diplomatic immunity. There is no real governance as we know it in the civilized world. Everything is used for the purpose and expanded towards an ultimate malign goal. So I don’t think Ayatollahs have no popularity in Iran. I'll tell you, the Shah of Iran, when we talked about the people of Iran didn’t want him, I stand to that, but the Shah of Iran executed ten to twelve people on average each year. And he was called as a dictator. Rouhani has killed over 3,000 since he came to power. Three thousands! Let me ask you something. And here I'm not talking about state of Texas that endorses corporal punishment and gives its people the due process of law. And then its people have chosen that form of law, because they elected the officials to choose that form of law, or promulgated whatever the word is. But in Iran, when they kill people, they don’t kill just because. They kill because they need to, for their survival and purpose of security, using the guy did this, that and the other as excuse. My God, you have people running around, throwing acid on girls’ faces because they demonstrated. If you wanted justice, then why don’t you get those guys and kill them? How come you don’t do that? How come you hang people in the street with a crane made in Italy?

The reason you do that is because you must, you have that necessity to execute to maintain your regime and survive. It’s the only reason why Ayatollahs kill. And to your question, if they have the popularity anyway, any ministry or industries in Iran, they would not kill anybody. To the extent that you and I are arguing, House Resolution 188 has 70 plus, 75 co-sponsors, condemning massacre of political prisoners in Iran, is perhaps partly responsible for them not having killed more after the recent uprising. The voices that you
have raised - including me being here today -- have a role in saving lives, believe or not. In 1980’s this was not the case. These Ayatollahs are much weaker today. If they didn’t need to kill 3,000 people in 1988, they would not have. So that’s hopefully a long, answer to your question.

John Fox: Just to, want to hear you elaborate your point about Voice of America and the international efforts as you see them to get information in and support indigenous independent information?

Dr. Sadeghpour: Voice of America, as I mentioned, is, I don’t want to use the word ‘revered’ entity in Iran, but it certainly is a reliable source of information for everyday fella in Iran. I say that because during the reign of Shah, I was a child, and I saw how my Muslim, pray five times a day, mom and dad wanted to get information. They certainly didn’t rely on the official channels of radio and TV. Radio Farda and others that are now available. In years past, perhaps, that’s why I mentioned the different paradigm in policy, because primarily driven by the policy, and perhaps partly also driven by the faint hope on the heart of some, that the regime will change its behavior, the voices of people, of opposition in Iran, not necessarily even from Iranian opposition movement, not me or anybody for that matter - but even from Members of Congress was not reflected, the bi-partisan Members of Congress. We have been gathering here for decades, Members of Congress have come and spoken against brutal dictatorship in Iran and its human rights violations. And it was very difficult to get adequate exposure. We were relying totally on the Iranian opposition’s satellite stations, and its television channel. But in recent months we have seen a sizeable shift in that as we have technology now. Our events are well-attended by some media organizations, I’m talking about Persian language ones, and the program reflects what has been said, not perverted or changed to fit in certain policy spectrum that the Department of State or somebody else going to have.

So all we have asked for is that the voices, and even then, we certainly don’t think there should be one-sided, I think everyone’s view should be reflected. That is democracy. But just not actively excluding voices of one segment of the population, because the population of diaspora per se, their voices, it reflects really heavily on the people of Iran. I think people of Iran are watching and are listening. There should be no doubt about that.

Everyday, there are things that happen in Iran which will surprise you. That’s where I began our conversation today, that people of Iran are very articulate and very articulate is not the word, they are very complex in their political views and how they consume the information and what they make of it, how they make final decisions about the world around them.

And so, getting the right information to them gives them the tools necessary. So I don’t think we’re not there yet. I think there is a significant work that the United States Congress and administration can do to help the Iranian people get the right information. The right information means just the facts. We’re not going to sugarcoat. “Leave gaza and Syria alone, tend to our grievances,” people were shouting in the streets this January. They are saying, your foreign policy is in question, not only what you do with us. That explains people’s abilities to understand the geopolitical environment beyond the confines of the city of Isfahan, Tabriz, or Mashhad, for example. And so, if its people in Iran are capable of chanting that in over a hundred cities, they are telling the international community that we know what this regime is up to and you need to help us so that we can do what we are out here to do. We want to sacrifice. But don’t hold this regime up.

Scholte: I was going to ask one more last question.

Dr. Sadeghpour: The gentleman there.

Scholte: I’m sorry, go ahead.

Congressional Staff Rep Question: In your argument that the conditions right now, there’s inevitable sort of, the instance is going to happen where eventually there’s enough building up within the people that just could occur. Do you think that in that case, there’s a turning point the international community sees, do you think there will be any instance, or action other than soft power measure, what I mean by that is, do you think that there will be any room for assistance, be there helping organize, or getting money to groups?)
Dr. Sadeghpour: You know, Organization of Iranian American Communities are clear in what they imply and what they supports. We are active in 40 states and the argument is well stated in our website. We want a secular, democratic republic in Iran. The largest Iranian opposition movement is the National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI), not so coincidentally, led by a woman. And if we throw our support, political support, behind anyone, us as a community, and also the international community, it would be the recognition of the intrinsic capability and capacity that I mentioned earlier. That requires the international community doing what’s right and creating, hence, the condition, creating the political space for the people of Iran to have breathing space. Right now, that political breathing space is very narrow and small, so when they come out, regime suffocates it and it dies in the streets.

Yes, we appreciate Members of Congress and the administration for supporting the uprising when it was occurring. But if we continue to curtail the Iranian regime activities in the region, and stop, - their Justice Minister by the way, Justice Minister of Iran who had a role in 1988 massacre to speak at the Geneva two weeks ago, perhaps the people of Iran would get a different message. We allowed a murderer, a mass murderer to speak at Geneva, the global community there. Once such transformations come, the breathing spaces normally changes; the opposition gets bigger breathing room and that gives the people the motivation to come forward.

I don’t think there will be a bloodless revolution in Iran. These guys are no fools, and these guys will kill until they go, but the people of Iran are up to the task. You just need to give them the backing, the moral backing, not money at all. That’s my response to that.

Scholte: Wonderful. (Applause) Thank you, Dr. Sadeghpour. Your website? I want to make sure everyone has your website.

Dr. Sadeghpour: www.oiac.org. Organization of Iranian American Communities. Thank you.

Scholte: Thank you so much. You did an amazing job covering so much. Thank you all for attending.