

# Tough and Smart on Iran

## Stopping Iran from Getting the Bomb

*A Third Way Message Memo*

### **The Message:**

George Bush and his allies in Congress have rushed the nation to the brink of another war with tough talk about regime change in Iran, but they have not been smart about protecting Americans. I will be tough when it comes to stopping Iran's nuclear weapons program and smart about using American power to accomplish that goal.

### **Offering a New Plan**

*I believe we need to be tough about stopping Iran from building a nuclear weapon. We also need to be smart about exploring all the options for achieving that goal, including diplomacy, sanctions, cooperation with other countries, and a credible military option that will achieve our goal of wiping out Iran's nuclear program. George Bush allowed his addiction to the idea of regime change to distract him from using the full range of American power to defend the nation. Instead, he's outsourced our diplomacy to other nations, used the press to engage in a war of words with Iran's hard-liners, and nearly painted the US into a corner with military strikes as the only way out. I won't make that mistake.*

*When elected to Congress, I will:*

### **1. Focus on the Goal: No Nuclear Weapons**

#### **Problem:**

The Bush Administration talks tough about the "axis of evil," but they haven't been smart about actually stopping Iran from developing a nuclear program. Instead, they have focused on regime change and rushed toward war—even Bush now admits that wasn't smart. Our nation should do everything we can to promote democracy, but the US military's mission is to protect Americans, and that does not always mean forcing regime change at gunpoint.

#### **Solution:**

Stop the panicky talk about war and regime change, no matter how much we oppose Iran's President and his hate speech. Focus on the nuclear issue, work with

other nations to offer Iran a way out if they do the right thing and consequences if they don't, and be prepared to accept "yes" as an answer from Iran. Even at the height of the Cold War, the US kept channels open with the Soviet Union; we should engage in direct dialogue with Iran—and then give diplomacy a chance to succeed.

**Policy:**

*President Bush himself should call for direct talks between the US and Iran on areas of mutual concern, including nuclear weapons. He must make it clear that an Iranian nuclear weapons program is likely to invite a US attack and will never deter one. If Iran agrees to give up nuclear weapons and terrorism, the US must be prepared to accept Iran's decision—regime change should not be our standard. The US also should be genuinely prepared to offer incentives, including ways Iran could legitimately develop civilian nuclear energy, such as with an intrusive inspections regime, and the easing of sanctions and bans on US companies that want to do business in Iran.*

## 2. Build International Opposition

**Problem:**

Rather than working to build and lead a true international coalition to pressure the Iranians on the nuclear issues, Bush stood on the sidelines. He chose to outsource negotiations with Iran to Europe and Russia, which have significant business interests to protect. Not surprisingly, those negotiations produced few results. The Administration also has a poor track record of advancing American interests in nuclear negotiations—a mission that failed in talks with India.

**Solution:**

Even as we lower the temperature generated by the talk of regime change, we should use every lever we have to crank up the pressure on the Iranians to come to a deal. The unhinged hate speech of the President of Iran has helped put the world on our side in this effort—there is consensus that Iran must not have nuclear weapons, and the world has been waiting for the United States to lead the way to a solution. There is time for a range of other measures, such as sanctions, to succeed in containing the Iranian program and convincing the Iranians to change—even Bush now appears to see that.

**Policy:**

*Continue to build international opposition to the Iranian program—and make sure the Iranians get a unified message. Work with the IAEA on enforcement mechanisms, including interdiction of supplies and materials that could be used to build Iran's nuclear program. Impose gradually stricter international sanctions, starting with travel bans and moving to denying foreign investment, cutting off supplies of refined gasoline—Iran imports 40 percent of their refined gasoline—and freezing global assets. Neutralize Iranian retaliation by securing agreement from other oil producing*

*nations to increase supplies and planning a release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to dampen price spikes.*

### 3. Maintain a Credible Military Option

#### Problem:

Iran may defy world opinion and build a nuclear weapon, no matter what. That is an unacceptable outcome: Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism in a volatile region that is critical to the global economy, run by a President who spews anti-American propaganda and calls for Israel to be “wiped off the map.” The Bush Administration has not been smart about heading off this possibility. Moreover, Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld have a bad track record in using military force: they have mismanaged both the military and the mission in Iraq. Among other costs, that has hurt our standing with regional partners.

#### Solution:

The US should use every means short of war to achieve our goals, something the Bush Administration apparently doesn’t know how to do. At the same time, we must have a credible military option, if diplomacy fails. That means solidifying international support, gathering the right intelligence, planning for the aftermath of a military strike, and bringing all the necessary resources for strategic success to bear—all things the Bush Administration has failed to do in Iraq and Afghanistan.

#### Policy:

*Sustain international support in the event of a military strike by continuing to work with the IAEA, the UN Security Council, and regional partners. Improve intelligence collection on Iran and broaden the range of human sources (i.e., do not limit to émigré opposition groups as was the case in Iraq), in order to develop accurate and up to date target data. Plan for the aftermath of an attack on Iran’s nuclear weapons facilities—such as defending and hardening targets where we expect retaliation, including Israel, Iraq, and shipping lanes in the Gulf. Plan for the need to escalate the conflict, should Iran retaliate directly against the American people. Prepare to provide humanitarian assistance to surrounding countries that would be affected by refugee flows.*

### Criticizing Bush and the Congressional Majority

Bush has talked tough—calling Iran a member of the “Axis of Evil”—but his talk is empty. When he took office, Iran was governed by reformers who wanted closer ties to the US and who helped us fight the Taliban. Bush ignored them. Now, Iran is governed by hardliners who support international terrorism and are building a nuclear bomb.

#### ***Bush and his rubber-stamp Congress took their eyes off the ball in Iran.***

- This administration got distracted by Iraq and stood on the sidelines when it came to Iran, handing over responsibility to the Europeans and the Russians.

- The ideologues in the White House and Pentagon have focused on regime change rather than preventing Iran from getting the bomb.
- This administration refused to support Iran's reformers when we had the chance, giving the mullahs a free hand.
- Now, after five years of dismissing Iranian reformers, the Administration suddenly wants to promote democracy inside Iran. We should find effective ways of standing with the Iranian people that won't actually hurt democracy activists—but that's a long-term solution. It's not the answer to the threat we face right now.

## Responding to Attacks

### **Attack:**

*Liberals are too weak to take on the most dangerous extremists like Iran. Conservatives are strong—they take the fight to the enemy.*

### **Response:**

We've had five years of tough talk and name-calling from Bush and his rubber-stamp Congress, but they have failed to stop Iran from moving forward on its nuclear program. We need to be tough AND smart, and we should sustain a full-court press, relying on the strength of our international alliances, economic leverage, and US military power to convince the Iranians that they cannot build nuclear weapons.

### **Attack:**

*Liberals were naïve in wanting to negotiate with Teheran—you can't negotiate in blind good faith with outlaw regimes.*

### **Response:**

American Presidents from Truman to Reagan to Clinton knew how to negotiate with dangerous adversaries from a position of strength. But Bush and his conservative allies simply walked away from the problem, putting ideological purity ahead of American security. Because of this, we are in a far more dangerous situation than we were 6 years ago.

### **Attack:**

*Dealing with Iran requires the use of force—liberals don't know how to do that.*

### **Response:**

Iran's nuclear program is spread out, so a pinprick airstrike, like the one Israel conducted against an Iraqi reactor in the 1980s, is unlikely to stop them for long—or maybe even at all. The Bush Administration only knows how to use one tool in the toolbox of American power: military force—and they don't even do that well. So before we start talking about nuclear airstrikes or an Iraq-style invasion of Iran, as some Bush extremists have suggested, let's make sure we use all the tools at our disposal and that Iran knows the whole world will be with us.