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UNTHINKABLE: IRAN, THE BOMB, AND AMERICAN STRATEGY

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**Introduction:**

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WITTES: Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

Thanks so much for joining us on what I know is an unexpectedly chaotic and anxious day here in Washington and I know that all of our thoughts are with those in Southeast who are facing injuries and dealing with the consequences of this terrible shooting.

I'm Tamara Wittes. I'm director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy here at the Brookings Institution and very grateful and delighted to have all of you with us as we celebrate the release of the latest book from our indispensable senior fellow, Ken Pollack, and the book, if you haven't already seen it outside on the table, is available for purchase out there. It is *Unthinkable: Iran, the Bomb, and American Strategy*.

Now, any Brookings audience knows Ken well and you know that he's been a central contributor to our work on Middle East security, on grand strategy on U.S. policy toward the region for over a decade. And he seems to specialize in tackling the thorniest, long-standing, most difficult policy and political challenges facing the United States in the region, from Iraq under Saddam Hussein to the degradation and collapse of Arab autocracies, to U.S.-Iranian relations. And so, I'm waiting, Ken, for your next book on the Middle East peace process.

MR. POLLACK: Where fools dare to tread.

MS. WITTES: Yes. Now, Ken's last book on Iran, *The Persian Puzzle*, told the history of the long conflict between the United States and Iran, beginning with the fall of the Shah, the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran in 1979. And Ken went through, in that book, the sorry history of efforts on each side to reach out and try to create a different dynamic in U.S.-Iranian relations and telling the story of how, essentially, every time one side seemed ready, the other side seemed to fall short.

Nonetheless, Ken insisted in *The Persian Puzzle* that the U.S.-Iranian relationship is critical to American interests and critical to regional security. Now, in this new book, *Unthinkable: Iran, the Bomb, and American Strategy*, Ken again takes on an issue that he's studied closely for years and that I think many of us find to be an enduring dilemma for the United States and that is the Iranian nuclear program and the challenges it presents to regional security, and specifically, to U.S. policy.

And drawing on his two decades of study, a wide variety of source material, the best of the existing academic and policy literature, Ken lays out and carefully explores all of the options remaining for seeking to prevent Iran from crossing the nuclear threshold and the options for

what to do if those efforts fail.

I know that you will find this learned and careful study worth a careful read and I hope that you will pick up a book on your way out if you have not done so already.

Now, to discuss *Unthinkable* and the story that it tells with Ken today, we are delighted to welcome our friend, our former colleague, Robin Wright, who is a distinguished fellow at the Wilson Center -- a distinguished scholar at the Wilson Center and also a senior fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Robin is an accomplished journalist having reported from, I think, more than 140 countries over her career at a variety of national newspapers. She has written for top magazines and I think her last full time journalistic post was at *The Washington Post* and after that we were delighted to have her join us here to work on a book. And since then she has gone on to a distinguished career as a scholar and analyst at the Carnegie Endowment, at Yale, at Duke, Stanford, and now, as I said, at USIP and the Wilson Center, and she is the author, among other things, of *The Iran Primer: Power Politics and U.S. Policies*. She has reported from Iran over the years and brings a tremendous wealth of insight to our discussion today.

So, Robin, thank you for joining us for this conversation with

Ken Pollack and thank you all for coming.

MS. WRIGHT: Thank you very much. I'm delighted to be here with Ken. I can think of no more timely subject, in light of all that's happening in the region and in light of what's going to happen next week at the United Nations, the opening of the General Assembly, then to talk about Iran and what happens next.

Everything in the Middle East seems eventually to wind its way back to Tehran in some form and in many ways Iran has been a greater challenge for us in the last six presidencies than any other single issue on a consistent basis.

We healed relations with Vietnam after the end of the war faster than we have healed relations with Iran after the takeover of the U.S. embassy in 1979. So, this is the one moment, and the very first time we've seen both countries actually on the same page, looking like they might want to do a deal.

President Obama confirmed yesterday in an interview on ABC that he had, in fact, already exchanged letters with President Rouhani, who was elected in June and took office in August. This is arguably the most important communication that two leaders have had on this extraordinary divide for years if not decades.

So, I want to begin with a really basic question: What

happens next? And what do we do to try to take advantage of this extraordinary moment?

MR. POLLACK: Boy-o-boy. First, let me start, Robin, by thanking you for joining me up here. You know, it's such a treat for me. You have always been one of the guiding stars of my work on Iran and it's a real pleasure to be up here. I really appreciate you joining me.

MS. WRIGHT: You have to know that he told me that he read my first book when he was still an undergrad, so --

MR. POLLACK: But I also said I wasn't going to say that.

I want to start by answering your question this way. You know, one of the things I say in the book is -- I use this little phrase that if you want to be an Iran expert, it's actually not that hard because you really only need to know two phrases, because they're the answer to pretty much every question you will ever be asked about Iran and those two phrases are "I don't know" and "it depends".

So, you ask me what's next, Robin, that's where I start from. I don't know. I'm watching carefully. It depends.

I think for me, you know, I start exactly where you do. I think this is a remarkably hopeful moment. I think -- I will say I believe that Rouhani is what he is making himself out to be. Having watched Rouhani now for the better part of two decades when he has been on the Iranian

political scene, you know, he's always struck me as someone who is very pragmatic, who would very much like to change Iran's direction, and I think that that is true both in terms of foreign policy as well as Iran's domestic politics and economy.

And I think that he feels that he was elected to make these kind of changes, and I think that's a very hopeful sign and I think that, you know, he's coming into these discussions, the negotiations that will reopen with the United States, with that very much in mind.

But, as you know well, with Iran there are always really big buts. And that's the problem. You know, we just don't know exactly what's going to happen. We've got domestic politics on both sides that are going to make it very hard for us to consummate a deal. I think Rouhani is the real deal, I think he wants a real deal with us. I don't know where the Supreme Leader is. I just don't. I don't know whether Rouhani is going to be able to convince the Supreme Leader to accept the deal that the United States would find acceptable, that the rest of the international community would find acceptable.

And by the same token, I don't know whether we're going to be willing to do the kinds of things that will probably be necessary to get the Iranians to make a deal if it's possible to get one at all. I'll just finish by saying, you know, you and I were talking beforehand about what I think

was a remarkable statement by Rouhani the other day where, you know, he gave an interview in which he said to journalists, you know, I absolutely mean it, I want to reopen negotiations, but the rest of the world has got to understand that time is not unlimited for this. I need this to happen and I need this to happen soon.

And I think that that was a really shocking statement for a lot of Americans and a lot of Israelis and probably a lot of Europeans and others as well because the assumption has always been that the Iranians were just trying to string out the negotiations, and I'll say I suspect that there probably are some Iranians who only ever wanted to string out the negotiations.

But what I think it points to is Rouhani has domestic politics too and I think that one of the biggest challenges is whether we're going to be able to give him enough to work with so that he can fend off his own hardliners and be able to consummate a deal with us, which is likely to be a very long process, and that's just what I don't know. It's why I am deeply hopeful that this happens. I think a diplomatic solution would be by far the best thing for Iran, for the United States, for Israel, Saudi Arabia, everyone involved, but I'm just not sure it's going to happen.

MS. WRIGHT: In many ways I've often thought if Obama could do -- could never do a deal, that he could sell both to the Iranians

and to Congress, and I think that maybe Rouhani is in the same boat, that he faces his own, as you say, skeptics or critics or doubters or hardliners at home.

All right, so in your book you talk about the various options. So, why don't you outline them for us in terms of how we approach, what the options are for us in dealing with the question of Iran's nuclear program?

MR. POLLACK: Sure. Thanks, Robin, and I'm going to do it pretty quickly because, of course, there's a lot in this book and I go into a great deal of detail and I don't want to bore you guys, besides I want to make you buy the book. I'm not going to give it all away.

I start, of course, with the diplomatic option, and as I said, I think is by far and away the best option. I think ultimately it is going to be a carrot and stick approach, and I recognize the Iranians don't like that phrase, but as I say in the book, as I've said elsewhere, you know, I always come back to the old Chinese saying that the beginning is wisdom is to call things by their right names. This is a carrot and stick approach. We have to see it in that way.

And I think to a certain extent we have to see it that way because we've done really well with the sticks, both in the Obama Administration and the Bush Administration, who both, I think, played their

hand very well in terms of the sticks and that has really been instrumental, both in getting the Iranians to the table and in building international support.

Where I think that we haven't done as well, and I think this is where Rouhani's statement comes in, is with the carrots. Remarkably, I think the Bush Administration did a much better job with the carrots than the Obama Administration. So far the Obama Administration has really only been willing to put on the table Boeing spare parts and lifting of sanctions, which is really, okay, the carrot is we'll stop beating you with a stick, which is not much of a carrot.

I think we have to do a lot better than that. We've got to show the Iranians that there's going to be something very meaningful, and I think we need to deal with their security concerns and their political aspirations as well as their very obvious economic needs. And I think if we're able to do that, there is some real potential there, we've got to try to make that work.

I then change gears and talk a little bit about regime change, and regime change is something I've talked about in this room before, it was something that I talked about in *Persian Puzzle*, and what I'll say is that I suspect that the Islamic Republic is not going to last forever, certainly not in its current form. I suspect that there will be change and I'd

like to believe that the United States perhaps can do some things that would help move that along.

I remain skeptical, though, that regime change is a true alternative policy that we can somehow bring about an overturning of the regime in real time. I think that what I described in *The Persian Puzzle* is the tyranny of the two clocks, that the clock of their nuclear program is running faster than the clock of regime change in Iran. I think that's still true.

That said, you know, this book has been written since 2009, since the birth of the Green Movement. And what I talk about in this book is that that really has fundamentally changed things. And I think that we need to be doing a much better job of trying to reach out to the Iranian people, to the Iranian opposition, and figuring out if there are ways that we can help them.

And I think to some extent, both -- well, particularly the Obama Administration has done some of that, but I think there's a lot more to be done. I'll put it this way, I think at least we ought to explore whether there's a lot more to be done on that. I just don't know the answer to it, but I, for one, was deeply embarrassed by the reticence, the quiet of the Obama Administration all throughout that period in 2009.

But again, I see regime change as being not an option in and

of itself. I think that helping the Iranian opposition is worth exploring, but I don't think that we can rely on that.

I then look hard at the possibility of an Israeli strike on Iran.

And, you know, I'm an old military analyst, this is the stuff I like most, these were the chapters in the book I enjoyed most, and I've got to say this, and I've said this on a stage many different -- many times before -- does Israel have a military option? Sure. Of course they do. Of course they could try. They're a very skillful military; they're very capable. Do they have a good military option? No. They do not.

And, you know, I can go through all kinds of different rationales and reasons for it, but I think the most persuasive I could offer is a very simple one: the Israelis are not like us. They don't give all other alternatives a chance. They don't believe in exhausting diplomacy before resorting to force. Okay? If they've got a good military option, they take it. It's often the first thing that they do.

And they certainly don't spend 15 years debating in public whether or not they're going to strike another country. They didn't say a word before Osirak. They didn't say a word to anyone in this room except maybe Mark Kimmet before Dar a Zauer. Okay? They had a good option, they took it. For 15 years they have been debating publicly whether or not to strike Iran and that should be the best proof of all that the Israelis

themselves know that while they have a military option, it isn't a good one. If you want more on that, again, I've got a long chapter that gets into this and that gets into the dilemmas that they face in terms of what they'd be trying to accomplish in the kind of diplomatic realm and in terms of reconstruction and what to expect in terms of retaliation.

So, I ultimately conclude that that's probably the worst of all the options that we would be looking at. And then I then turn to what I think is, of the two ultimate options, the real alternative to my choice, and that's the U.S. military option. And I spend a lot of time with that. And again, those of you who may have read *Persian Puzzle* you know I dealt with it in that book and I ultimately concluded it was a bad option, especially at that time, ten years ago, I felt there were lots of other choices that we should exhaust beforehand.

And this time around I came back to it and, again, I started from scratch and simply worked my way through the military option, and what I'll say is that I came down in a slightly different place from last time. I think that there is more to recommend the military option this time around than was the case ten years ago. A lot has changed in those ten years, but ultimately, the more I worked through the military option, the more that I felt that this really wasn't the best -- or perhaps a better way to put it -- the least bad option that we would face.

In other words, if diplomacy fails, I don't think that a resort to work with Iran -- and unfortunately, I think that the military option really is a resort to war with Iran -- is our best course of action. I don't think it's stupid, I don't think that the people who are advancing it are stupid or unpatriotic, I think it's a very real alternative option out there.

But when I weigh the costs and risks between the use of force and its real alternative, which is a containment regime, which I'll just talk about in a moment, at the end of the day, I think that the costs and risks of containment are more bearable, better in keeping with what we're looking to do in the world, and ultimately more practical than the costs and risks that we will face with military strikes.

And then I spend the last part of the book dealing in great detail with containment, because you have containment -- first of all, no American likes containments. The chapter that introduces containment I call "The Strategy that Dare Not Speak its Name" because the fact is, nobody likes containment. Containment is what we do when we can't do what we like, which is have a really good relationship with a country or invade them and get rid of the government and replace it with one that we would like.

Containment is kind of a residual category and no one likes it for that reason, but what I point out as I go through is, first, we're actually

really good at containment, it turns out. We've actually been able to practice it much more skillfully than others, and I recognize -- and I try to be very upfront and very honest about it in the book -- containment has problems. There's no question about that. There are a number of good articles out there, all of which I cite, which talk about the problems that we would face in containing Iran, in containing a nuclear Iran.

But I think that when you work through them exactly as I do in the book where at least I come out is that there are problems, there are costs and risks, but I see them ultimately as more bearable and ultimately more solvable, for lack of a better term, than the costs and risks I see with the military option.

And at the end I basically say, you know, my bottom line is, look, you know, you can agree with me, you can disagree with me, the only thing I hope is that if the diplomacy fails, we'll have actually thought through these other options so that unlike Syria, we aren't just suddenly confronted with a terrible choice that we haven't done any thinking about, and we have to see these two options, which right now we're thinking of as unthinkable, and make them thinkable.

MS. WRIGHT: Thank you. You know, we all think we understand what containment is because we understand the word contain, but in fact containment actually has a lot of different options, a lot of

different costs, a lot of different military options. So, maybe you could outline, kind of in general terms, what the different kinds of containment might look like, what they would involve in terms of our forces, our treasurer, at a time of, you know, sequestration and budget constraints, and what's realistic, and where we might find partners as part of that process to help us share the responsibility, the costs.

MR. POLLACK: Sure. Let me at least hit high points on each one of those different issues, Robin, because every one of them, you're right, is very important to containment.

Let me start by saying, from my perspective, one of the most important things to think about is, containment is not appeasement, and unfortunately that's the rap that it's gotten in Washington. And don't get me wrong, I think that there are a lot of people in Washington -- maybe not a lot, but certainly some -- who would be glad to appease the Iranians. They certainly have their lobby, there's certainly people in town who couldn't care less, let them do whatever they want to, who don't believe that the Iranians are a threat or a problem in any way. That's not where I come from.

I do believe that Iran has been very problematic for the United States. While I do recognize that there are Iranians who would like to have a much better relationship with the United States, unfortunately

they have too rarely been the ones in charge in Iran. And we have had real problems with them.

And so, for me, containment is not appeasement, it is not about doing anything you want. In fact, containment is the opposite of appeasement. It's also the opposite of war, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's not the opposite of appeasement, and as you point out, Robin, you can imagine very different kinds of containment regimes, and I talk about in the book the history of the containment of the Soviet Union and Nicaragua and North Korea, Iraq, Cuba, Libya, all these different countries that we have contained over the years, including Iran itself, who we have been containing since 1979 even though only one administration had the courage or stupidity to actually admit that that was its policy, and of course our own Martin Indyk was responsible, and Martin, unfortunately, paid the price for his honesty and intellectual integrity in doing so.

But containment can mean many different things and it can mean many different things at different times, and what I talk about in the book is that we do need to think about containment as being a very complex and flexible strategy toward Iran, which at different points in time can become more assertive, more pressurized or less assertive and perhaps more reticent, more open to, in effect, détente with the Iranians.

In fact, one of the reasons that I like containment as an alternative is because you can continue to talk and it holds open the prospect of diplomacy at some point in the future, maybe when things have changed on our side or changed on their side.

But of course it also holds out the prospect of employing, as part of a containment regime, limited uses of force, covert action, if we choose to do so, additional sanctions or continued sanctions, and a whole panoply of other means of putting pressure on the Iranian regime either to keep them on the defensive and prevent them from doing things that we don't like or to try to press them to do things that we want them to do.

And of course, when you think about the range of different containment regimes that we've practiced, and obviously we've handled, for instance, Cuba after the Cuban Missile Crisis very differently from our containment of Iraq in the 1990s. When we were containing Iraq, if you remember, we had a massive, incredibly aggressive covert action campaign against Saddam, we had comprehensive draconian sanctions, and especially after 1998, we were bombing him on an almost daily basis.

So, you can imagine containment being very different kinds of things.

Now, you asked about military forces, one of the things I like most about containment, is that actually, it really wouldn't be that costly.

This is something Mike O'Hanlon, who's in the back of the room, and I go back and forth over. Mike believes that there are some costs involved but they're not crippling. I believe that the costs are actually quite low because my feeling is there's nothing that we would have, or pretty much nothing that we would have in the Gulf, for containment that we wouldn't want to have anyway.

The size of the U.S. military is a sized based, in large part, based on emergencies and contingencies, and what we have in the Gulf is actually small.

For my mind, it's one of the most important things to think about with Iran is that Iran, in many ways, would be very different from the Soviet Union. Oftentimes I think, again, people disparage containment of Iran because they assume that it's going to require an effort like containment to the Soviet Union. It won't.

Iran is a much smaller country. They're certainly difficult, they can certainly be aggressive, they can certainly be problematic. But let's remember, the thing that was most problematic all throughout the Cold War and the thing that was most dangerous, both from the perspective of containment and nuclear deterrents, was the Red Army. There's no Red Army with Iran. Iran has negligible conventional military forces. Our military is more than able to deal with any conventional

military threat that Iran might pose to pretty much any of its neighbors with the exception of if the Iranians wanted to grab a bunch of Iraqi oil wells, yes, that would probably be difficult for us to deal with, probably only because the Iraqis wouldn't invite us in for it.

But anything else you can think of, I mean, you know, worrying that the Iranians are going to come across the Gulf and seize Bahrain or seize the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, sleep easy. That ain't the problem with Iran. And that really bounds the problem and it really changes the nature.

Now, that's not to say that there aren't issues with Iran, there aren't problems with Iran, things that we won't face. Glad to go into them in more detail, but I'll just tick some off quickly. We will have problems of crisis management with Iran, we always do. If Iran acquires an actual nuclear weapon, we will have problems with proliferation and, one of the fears that I raised back in *Persian Puzzle*, they're likely to become more aggressive. Those are all things that I think that we can imagine dealing with as part of a containment regime. None of them's a freebee, none of them's easy, none of them is cost free, but all of them are well within our capabilities to deal with and what's more, I think that we will find that we will have allies to do so.

Yes, you know, the Gulf states will be annoyed at us initially,

but I think that they will come around very quickly. I do not think they will be co-opted. In fact, the history of the Gulf states is, they like to balance, not bandwagon, and in fact, if you're nervous about the Saudis proliferating, and I am, that's balancing behavior, that's standing up to the Iranians.

But again, I think there are ways to deal with every single one of these problems. And again, that's one of the reasons why I prefer containment, because when I think about opening the Pandora's Box of military action against Iran, I start getting into scenarios that I really don't know how we would quite deal with them, whereas when I look at containment, in every case I can identify problems and say, that's going to be an issue, but in every case I can also think through, you know what, there are about a half dozen ways that we can deal with this problem.

MS. WRIGHT: Okay, I want to press you further, though, because this is too abstract for me. I know what diplomacy is, it's going into a room and it's agreeing on things. I know what a military strike looks like, unleashing bombs and artillery or whatever against a target. You know, you talk in kind of general philosophical terms about containment. I want to know, what are we containing? What specifically do we contain and how do we do it? Because I don't think this is obvious and I think this is something we're not aware of as an American population, even those of

us who have spent a long time covering this country.

So, tell us what specifically we're containing and how we're going to do it.

MR. POLLACK: Great question. You want to know what containment looks like? We're doing it right now. Just look at exactly what we're doing right now. Our goal in the Middle East, our goal in the Persian Gulf, is to prevent the Iranians from expanding beyond their borders and to the best of our ability making mischief beyond their borders with the second being a lesser, but still important goal, the first being the primary.

That's what containment is ultimately going to look like, and especially if we wind up with a nuclear Iran, that is Iran with an actual nuclear arsenal, that is still what we would be doing. The great thing about that is, Iran's possession of a nuclear arsenal should not necessarily change the threat of Iranian expansion beyond its borders.

So, again, as I said, during the Cold War, the real fear that we had was the Soviets would say, basically, dare us to stop them from invading Western Europe or Northeast Asia, and because we had a nuclear balance between us, we wouldn't dare to use nuclear weapons and because they had conventional superiority, they'd beat us.

The most basic level containing Iran would mean preventing

it from expanding beyond its borders, and as I've said, we've got that covered and we're going to have it covered for the conceivable future.

You want to challenge me on that, Robin?

MS. WRIGHT: I do. I do.

MR. POLLACK: Go.

MS. WRIGHT: If I were sitting in Tehran I would say, hmm, since 2003 the Americans have given us Iraq on a platter and Afghanistan, the Taliban is gone, our friends in Hezbollah have taken on the Israelis and held them off longer than any other air force, our buddy in Damascus has survived and with Russian help has maybe even managed to prolong his ability to hold on to that office. I don't know if our containment has been so effective. So, that's why I still go back to this, you know, what physically are we containing?

You know, they have a lot of allies in the region, arguably more than they did a decade ago, and they are in a stronger strategic position in the region, and if that's containment --

MR. POLLACK: See, I'd paint a very different portrait, Robin, and we can argue about this, but I'd paint a portrait of Iran that is more isolated than it's ever been, that is economically and politically weaker and more isolated than it's ever been.

I think for the moment Rouhani's got a lot of people excited,

but imagine if Salahi had won the election or even where they were over the summer. They've got, you know, sanctions imposed on them that are crippling their economy, their only friend in the region, Bashar al-Assad is on the ropes, Hezbollah is delegitimized, Hamas is turning away from them.

I think if, you know, you give me a choice between America's situation in the region and Iran's, I'd still choose America's situation and I think that we've done a lot of damage to ourselves.

But let's go beyond that. I don't want to have the debate with you over that because you've actually put two different threats on the table and I'll deal with them in turn. First, again, is the conventional threats, okay. You know, Iran has no conventional -- as long as our forces are in the region, even at the level that they are currently at, they simply do not have the capability to do anything conventionally.

Yeah, if we were to withdraw from the region, even then their conventional capabilities are so limited, maybe they could grab Bahrain if they really wanted to, although I don't think they really want to. I think the idea of owning Bahrain and all of its problems is not something the Iranians are looking for.

But, again, we're not leaving the Gulf, and under containment we wouldn't be leaving the Gulf. We'd be maintaining,

effectively, the posture we have and, as I said, we've got them covered.

They simply have no conventional threat.

The real issue that you're raising, and I think it's a much more interesting one, and again, it's the issue that I raised 10, 11 years ago in *Persian Puzzle*, is the issue of Iranian subversion, their support for terrorism, their support for insurgencies and other violent extremist groups around the region, and that one I take very seriously. I think I'm one of the first people to put that on the table. It's what I call "the Pakistan problem", which is that once they get nuclear weapons, that, like the Pakistanis, they may actually be emboldened to go much further, and I think that's a very real consideration.

But I'll make three points in response to that, and three points to think about as part of a containment regime, which is, one, there's lots of things that we can do about that, things that we should have done, the things that we've thought about doing, the things that we've done half heartedly. You know, as you well know, the Iranians don't create problems out of whole cloth. What they do is they go in and they try to take advantage of existing problems, they try to exacerbate them, which goes to our role in trying to help solve those problems, you know, the problems that Tammy alluded to in her introductory remarks within each of these societies, the problems that have given rise to the Arab

Spring and the civil wars that followed, these are the kinds of things that the Iranians have been trying to take advantage of and there's obviously a role in the United States in helping these societies deal with those internal problems that the Iranians aren't able to take advantage of them.

There are things that we could do in terms of counterinsurgency training, we've done pretty well with counter terror, but there's still more even there that we could do to that, there's a whole bunch of other things that we could do in terms of fighting the Iranians head-on.

But a second point to note is, whereas the Iranians like to make trouble and have fought us all across the region, fought the Saudis all across the region, their success rates have actually been pretty low. You're right, Hezbollah drove Israel out of Lebanon. That was a big victory for Hezbollah, but neither Hezbollah, Hamas, or any of the other groups, has been able to overturn the state of Israel, and what's more, when you look at the history of Iranian subversion, it's worth noting, the Iranians have never started a civil war. All they've been able to do is make them worse. They've never started an insurgency. They have certainly made some worse, but that's about it. And they have never successfully overthrown a foreign government, despite the fact that they've been trying for 30 years, that's another one where actually we've got one up on them, we have successfully overthrown a few foreign

governments, much to our regret later on and maybe the Iranians would figure that out --

MS. WRIGHT: (off mic).

MR. POLLACK: Exactly. Maybe if the Iranians ever do get one, maybe they'll realize it was a mistake, but again --

MS. WRIGHT: All they need to do us turn to us.

MS. POLLACK: Right, and of course the key is to not try to and then it happens, right? In any event, the point is that their capabilities to do so are limited.

And then the final point that I would make about that is, while I see this as a real problem, I see this as a real threat, I do not see it as being worth going to war with Iran over. If, at the end of the day, the choices that we face, as I fear they will be, are a choice between going to war with Iran and containing Iran and dealing with this problem, I think that the choice is an obvious one. The problems that we will face, the risks and costs of going to war are just so much greater than dealing with an Iran that is, itself, but perhaps more so in the future.

And so, I don't dispute the fact that we will face this problem. I suspect that we will. But I think that there are ways to deal with it. I don't think that we should make the Iranians out to be ten feet tall. And as I said, at the end of the day, even if this problem is worse than it is today, it

ain't worth going to war in my book.

MS. WRIGHT: Okay, you just made a sweeping statement.

If they were --

MR. POLLACK: Just one?

MS. WRIGHT: On this one. You talked about the Iranians being emboldened if they had the bomb. Emboldened in what ways? Are you suggesting that they might use a weapon? That they might use it as political leverage to enhance their position in the region? Be specific, because that's often said in kind of general terms. What do you mean specifically?

MR. POLLACK: Sure, and I deal with all those different issues in the book. As I think many of you know, I've worn many hats in my lifetime. I've been an intelligence analyst, I've been a policymaker, or at least policy advisor, I've also been an academic, and I mine the history and I mine the academic literature on all these, so again, let me just talk through each of them.

First, there is this issue of would Iran use nuclear weapons? I think the jury is pretty firmly out there that they will not. Okay? There are people who fear it, I know that, and there's obviously no way that you can ever prove that they won't, but when you look both at the history of other states that have acquired nuclear weapons and more importantly the

history of the Iranians themselves, there is absolutely nothing to suggest that they would simply get nuclear weapons and use them. They are not irrational. They are not crazy. They're not even reckless.

What we've seen from the Iranians is, they are aggressive, they are anti-America, they're certainly anti-Semitic, and I use that in terms of both Jews and Arabs, they are certainly anti-status quo, they will push where they can, they try to figure out where our red lines are and they push right up to them, sometimes they get a little bit across, but what's so fascinating about the Iranians is that when they realize that they've crossed the red line, they pull back, and they pull back very quickly, and that's very important.

And what's fascinating to me, again, talking to any number of Israelis, any number of Gulfies, the number of people who actually are in positions of responsibility who know anything about the Iranians who believe otherwise, I just couldn't find any. And in fact, as I site in here, there have been repeated polls of Israelis showing that Israelis overwhelmingly, 80 percent, pretty much consistently in polls, do not fear that Iran would use a nuclear weapon for them. And obviously when you've got nuclear weapons you always have to guard against this. It's something that we dealt with with the Soviets, but again, I mined a lot of this Cold War history in this as well and one of the most important lessons

from the Cold War history was that we and the Russians made an enormous mistake in assuming that the other country was trying to mount a surprise nuclear attack on them. We spent -- we wasted obscene amounts of dollars and rubles trying to guard against a threat that was simply nonexistent. And what's more, we actually got ourselves into crises and made those crises much worse, on both sides, it wasn't just us, the soviets as well, because of this fear of this highly unlikely but utterly disastrous if it ever happened, kind of scenario.

And the lesson of the Cold War was, do not fall prey to that thinking.

So, that is not what I'm worried about in terms of an emboldened Iran. I'm also not worried about an emboldened Iran in terms of conventional forces, I've already mentioned that. I do not think that they will have the capacity to do so.

I think there certainly is this potential for them to become more emboldened in terms of unconventional warfare, as I discussed, but even there, I suspect that's what would happen, I suspect that they would go to Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad and say to them, you know, feel free to amp things up, guys, feel free to come back to us with bigger operations, riskier operations, things that we weren't really comfortable with you guys doing beforehand, but now maybe we would be willing to

allow you to do.

But as I said, I think there are ways to deal with that, and in addition, going through again the history of nuclear weapons, what was fascinating to me was that each nuclear state pretty much consistently behaved the same way after they acquired nuclear weapons as they did before, okay. There are two exceptions -- or one real exception, one possible -- the real exception was Pakistan. As I said, Pakistan clearly behaves far more aggressive after they acquire nuclear weapons than they did beforehand. And the other possible exception, and this is an arguable point, but I would make it, is that Israel I think did act in somewhat more restrained fashion after they acquired nuclear weapons. And again, that's debatable. By my count they launched nine wars after they acquire nuclear weapons, but nevertheless, I think you can point to elements of restraint.

All the other nuclear powers, same before, same after. And the most important one for me there is North Korea, okay, remember, when North Korea -- when they were approaching -- we were all terrified of this, for good reason. As I say in there, you know, when you talk about kind of being opaque and irrational, North Korea makes Iran look like Canada. They look transparent and boring and completely passive compared to the North Koreans.

I think by most accounts the North Koreans have had a nuclear weapon since the mid-90s, about 17 years. I would never say that the North Koreans have been less aggressive than they were beforehand, but they also haven't done anything completely crazy. We all worried that they would incinerate Seoul or Tokyo. They haven't. And that's, I think, a very important lesson as well, and as I said, when I look at Iranian behavior, they look far more prudent than the North Koreans.

MS. WRIGHT: You just made a statement about the Iranians being anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish --

MR. POLLACK: Israeli and Arab.

MS. WRIGHT: You know, and I think we ought to get down to this, because that's really the nitty-gritty of all of this. What are their intentions? Do they really, as Ahmadinejad said, want to wipe Israel off the map, or as Rouhani, in one of his first Tweets said, on the eve of the Jewish New Year I want to wish all Jews, especially Iranian Jews, Happy New Year, and the Foreign Minister, in his second Tweet after the first one saying, "Greetings, I've signed on to Twitter," saying, "Happy New Year". And then he was queried by an American who suggested that she would feel much better if the Foreign Minister would deny the denial of Israel's right to exist.

And Zarif, the Foreign Minister, went through and said,

“There’s only one man --“ or denied the holocaust, “and that man is gone. Happy New Year.”

And what made this exchange so very interesting was from a Twitter account, SFPELOSI and I looked at that name and I thought, hmmm, Pelosi. So, I tracked the Twitter account down and it’s Nancy Pelosi’s daughter. So, I went through to the Foreign Minister because I have his email and I said, “Did you realize that you were in a Twitter exchange, as one of your first half dozen Tweets, with the daughter of a very influential American politician?” And he came back within five minutes and said, “Yes, ma’am, I did,” which was really telling to me that this was, I thought, quite genuine, that -- at least from them.

So, my question is, what are Iranian intentions with Israel? You know, which of these two extremes really represent what they want? And what difference would it make in their ambitions and their policy if they had the nuclear capability?

MR. POLLACK: It’s a great question, Robin, and, you know, if you’re really wondering about this, I’d like to recommend to you the work of another author whose done some work on this. Her last name begins with a W, it might be Wright or something like that. Her work is really good on the subject.

So, I’ll give you my answer as best as I’ve learned it from

you and others and it starts with I don't know and it depends. I think that Iran is a collective, and I think this is really what you're getting at. And, again, to pay you a compliment, I think it's why your work on Iran has been so wonderful because you get into the complexity of Iran and the richness of the culture and the divergence of views, and I think we always have to keep that in mind.

And I have a hard time -- I've been talking about Iran this and Iran that, but I always get nervous when we do throw around the collective of Iran because my own experience, even with just the government, is that there are so many different views within it and you can find different people who believe very, very different things.

And that's my sense of where they are on Israel and the Arab world as well.

I will start by saying, you know, my sense is that, first, the average Iranian I don't think could care less about Israel or the Arab world. I think that to a certain extent there are many Iranian elites who tend to look down on Arabs. It's certainly something that my Arab friends complain about endlessly, is this kind of Persian arrogance, which just pisses them off. But, you know, that doesn't necessarily define policy, and I think that there are very different views within the Iranian establishment. You know, there is a history, a long history, of Persian dominance of the

Middle East, and I think that there are a lot of Iranians, certainly a lot of Iranian leaders, who believe that this is just kind of the natural order, and as I point out in this book, as I pointed out in *Persian Puzzle*, I mean, look, they've been the greatest power in the Middle East in this part of the world for a good 2,500 years with just a 600 year exception for the Islamic and Mongol conquest.

So, it's not hard to imagine that they would see this as kind of the natural way of things. And I think that there are many who would like very much to be seen still as the dominant power.

But, you know, as you were pushing me beforehand to be more specific about what containment would look like, I think in the same way we need to be more specific about how this kind of airy-fairy, we'd like to be the biggest kid on the block or the (inaudible), how that translates into things, and I think what we've seen is a real range of different opinions with some Iranians wanting very much to be the dominant power, to be able to decide who rules in Riyadh or who rules in Manama or who rules in Baghdad, and others, you know, seeing that as completely irrelevant, not just to their lives, but to the wellbeing of Iran.

You know, in my mind, one of the most important things about the position that people like Rouhani and Rafsanjani, to a certain extent, Khatami and others have taken has been mostly to say, look,

Iran's greatness is going to come from within ourselves, it's going to come from building a new society, from rebuilding our economy, from realizing our full potential as Iranians, not necessarily in dominating the region and making everyone else do what we want.

And that's, obviously, I think, a message that is something every American would want to hear and is fully compatible with our interests and our views in the region. It's why I hope that Rouhani wins.

For the Supreme Leader, you know, that's where the "I don't know" comes in. You know, one of the things I've learned watching dictatorships for 25 years or more is you can never know what's in the head of a leader, you never really know what's in his or her head. And I think that's especially true for Khamenei, who, you know, he says a lot of things but is never terribly revealing, and I don't think any of us have a really good feel for what exactly is in his mind.

But when I look at Khamenei, and with the help of people like Akbar Ganji and Karim Sadjadpour and others who have tried to kind of get a grip on what he thinks, my sense is of a man who is profoundly paranoid, who is deeply fearful, who is not necessarily someone who is looking to conquer the Middle East or even dominate it, but who sees enemies behind every tree and is looking desperately to protect himself and his regime and his country as he sees it, and I think he's done a lot of

very dangerous and damaging things in the interest of protecting himself, but to me that's the overwhelming leitmotif.

And so, when I think that they look out at Israel, at least the leadership, I don't think there are too many people in the leadership who love Israel, who like Israel. Even Zarif said we'll never be friends with Israel, but I think that it runs the gamut from those who really would like to destroy the state of Israel and others who just think, you know what, we don't particularly like the place but we don't have anything against it either. And, by the way, I think that there's still -- you know, the Iranian version of Uri Lubrani, the Israeli who's always said, you know, Iran and Israel are natural allies -- I think some of those guys are still out there as well. And I think the same thing for the Arab world. I think it runs the gamut from those who very much would like to dominate the Arab world and others who would just like to have a normal relationship and would like to focus on what's going on at home. It's why I think, again, the best thing for us would be to strike this deal with Rouhani, in part because I think that it would help that worldview to take hold in Tehran, and that would be great for us well beyond the nuclear arena.

MS. WRIGHT: Just one note on that, I'm always struck by the fact that Iran's constitution allows for a Jewish member of parliament, as with four Christians and one Zoroastrian seat, minority seats,

proportionate to their representation, and I've been to synagogues and shiraz in Tehran, the kosher butcher in Tehran, the Jewish school, and the Jewish hospital where all the Ayatollahs like to go, and on your remark about the pride of Iranians, I always say, the best way to understand Persians is to think of the most chauvinistic Texan you know and add 5,000 years, and then you begin to understand just how proud they are.

Okay, one last question and then we'll open it up to the audience. Syria, you know, the Iranians are players in Syria. There was a video that came out this weekend interviewing an Iranian Revolutionary Guard about his troops and what they were doing in Syria. It was quite shocking.

Is this a place that the United States and Iran could ever agree? Is there a deal, given the fact that the Iranians have been actually pretty critical of the use of chemical weapons and have all but implied that they hold the government responsible without saying that, but they haven't tried to blame it on the opposition or, as the Russians apparently did today, on figment of someone's imagination? And is there a danger that Syria becomes a deeper proxy war between the two?

MR. POLLACK: Sure. I think -- let me start with that last point and work my way back to your first point. I think there obviously is a danger that Syria could become something of a proxy war between the

two of us. I will say, I'm not sure how much it will hurt either of us though. You know, people talked about it becoming Iran's Vietnam. You know, unless the Iranians are willing to start sending tens of thousands of their boys to Syria, I'm somewhat skeptical of that.

Obviously, it could begin to cost them more, and money is not something that they have in great supply right now, but I think it's hard for us to know, and I keep pushing people within the U.S. government and elsewhere to give me better figures for exactly how much it is costing the Iranians, but let's remember, waging these kinds of wars can often be quite cheap. If what you're sending is Kalashnikovs and bullets and EFPs and mines and things like that, that's not terribly expensive for the Iranians. If they wind up sending battle tanks and fighters and having to buy that for the Syrians, that could be much more expensive.

But I'm somewhat skeptical and I certainly don't see the United States ever putting boots on the ground, in spite of Secretary Kerry's reservation on that score, so again I'm skeptical that it could become that kind of a problem.

I could imagine it, though, becoming a crisis between us. I could imagine circumstances where we could become more at loggerheads. As you know, just last week we ran a simulation where we were looking at the endgame in Syria, looking at a situation, being very

optimistic, where the Assad regime was falling and to see what the Iranians might do in those circumstances.

And what was interesting to me was a few things, first, our Iran team, which I think was a very good Iran team as far as we're able to recreate here -- it could have been a better one because we could have had some other people on it, but be that as it may, I think we had a pretty good Iran team. And first their sense was that Iran was very committed, although I will say that there were members of the Iran team who did feel like if Bashar really was falling, they needed to cut their losses, and if at some point they're willing to cut their losses, I think that does open up the possibility of doing a deal, it opens up the possibility that those in Tehran will say, you know what, he's going down the tubes, we're not going to be able to save him, so the smartest thing for us is to cut a deal with the Americans now while we still have some leverage and be the ones who help get him out and maybe help bring the Alawis to the table. Better that than to have him simply swept aside and then we get left with nothing.

So, I think that that is out there as a possibility.

But it was also striking to me that our Iran team ultimately decided that, no, they were going to keep going, they were going to keep doubling down, they were going to keep reinforcing Bashar, and if that's the case, then I think it is going to be hard for the U.S. and Iran to reach

any kind of agreement over Syria, although again, as I said, there was nothing about this game that suggested to me that we're likely to wind up spending tons and tons of dollars, let alone men and women killed in it, but the one other issue that really didn't come up in the game that we were wondering about was the potential for horizontal escalation, in other words, for the Iranians to decide, okay, the way that we're going to save Bashar is to create a problem somewhere else, and what was really striking was the Iran team was not interested in that because their own feeling was, look, we have much bigger problems, and if we start creating problems with the Americans elsewhere, we're opening it up for them to come back and hit our nuclear program.

It's one of the reasons why I think that Syria has stayed pretty contained, because I think the Iranians look at this and say, you know what, we have to get through our own problems, we will do as much as we can for the Syrian regime within those boundaries, but we're not going to sacrifice our nuclear program, our economy, some kind of major American military move directly against us to save Bashar.

MS. WRIGHT: Wonderful. Okay, now it's your turn to ask Ken questions, and we'll begin here. If you could identify yourself, please.

SPEAKER: Nick Joser from (inaudible). You talked about carrots. Is Rouhani supposed to actually offer carrots to people inside the

country? This morning he offered a few new projects to IRGC just a week before flying to New York. So, he may have to do this, but are there sticks also involved in Iran or not?

MR. POLLACK: Absolutely. Again, as I keep saying, it's got to be a carrot and stick policy. Again, I think we've done much better with the sticks than we have with the carrots. I am a little bit nervous, I talk about in the book, that we're getting close to making -- I worry that we're going to make our sanctions unsustainable. I was, as many of you know, scarred by our Iraq experience where we did create sanctions that became unsustainable over time because they were too harsh, and I worry about that in Iran.

My experience, sanctions -- the literature on this is very good. It takes a long time for sanctions to really have their effect. So, I would not suggest that we ought to be lifting sanctions unilaterally, but I think we need to do a lot better in terms of showing Rouhani what is in it for Iran, all the good things that can flow, and I think we have to pony up a lot more. And I talk about trade credits and investment guaranties and assistance with international financial organizations, I mean, this is where actually the Bush Administration did better in terms of saying, we'll bring you into the WTO, we'll do all these other things.

But it gets to the first part of your question, which is, Rouhani

is going to have a fight, and honestly, we always knew this. You know, back in 2002, 2003, whenever -- I was one of the first people to lay out the carrot and stick policy then and I said this is about trying to help Iran's moderates, its pragmatists, win the debate with their hardliners, and we've got to give them the ammunition to do so. And that's going to come from both the negative and the positive incentives. I said, I think we're going to have to show Rouhani fairly quickly that this can pay off in exactly the ways that the Iranians want it to.

That's not about making concessions unilaterally, and it's not about giving him something for nothing, I would never do either of those things, but he's got to know that he's going to have what he needs to win that fight with those members of the Iranian regime that aren't interested or may just be very skeptical of the deal.

MS. WRIGHT: Do we have any females? Yes.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) from ASCGS fellow. I buy in your arguments that in regard of the costs and risks, the containment is the favorable option, but only if you look in Iran at an isolated case. What -- will you look at the whole nonproliferation regimes like if you allowed Iran as a non-nuclear weapons state member of the NPT to acquire nuclear weapons? What will change your calculation in regard of costs of risk if it brings down the whole nonproliferation regime?

MR. POLLACK: Sure. It's a great question. And it is something that I have worried about. And, again, when I wrote *Persian Puzzle* I said, this is the great risk. And what I'll say about that is that I think that if Iran does cross the nuclear threshold now -- and I want to say a point about that -- but if they do, let's take your worst case scenario, if they do cross that threshold, yes, it will in theory be a blow to the nonproliferation regime. I think that in practice it will prove to be the opposite because what supports the nonproliferation regime is not the fact that it's an international law, okay, yes that may be important to Sweden, that may be important to other law abiding countries out there. I don't think it matters at all for the countries that really are problematic. It wasn't a problem for North Korea, it wasn't a problem for Saddam's Iraq, it wasn't a problem for Libya's Kaddafi.

The real fire break, the real preventive mechanism, and we've seen this over and over again, is the price that countries will have to pay to go nuclear. Okay? It's why I count North Korea ultimately a nonproliferation success, because when other countries look at North Korea, they'll say, yeah, they've got a nuclear weapon, they paid an horrific price to get it; we would never be willing to pay the kind of price to get nuclear weapons that North Korea did. And I think that the same would be true for Iran.

Again, containment is not appeasement, it's not walking away, it's not saying, well, we gave it our best shot, you know, let's all go home and they're just going to get what they want. It's going to mean that Iran is going to remain poor and weak and isolated, in a state that I don't think any other country in the world is going to look at and say, that was a great idea, you know, this is why we should get nuclear weapons because we want to be just like them. In fact, I think the opposite is true. I think the world -- and, you know, here I give the Israelis a lot of credit because it was really they who held the world's feet to the flame and who basically forced everyone to take this seriously and as a result, I think if Iran were to cross that nuclear threshold, it would be a lesson for everybody else that, you know what, it really isn't work it. You have to be willing to pay the kind of price that Iran -- and not just Iran, Iran's hardliners, alone, are willing to pay. I don't think there are too many others.

Last point on that, I also don't give up on the possibility that we will not prevent Iran from crossing that last threshold. Yeah, I take very seriously what the Supreme Leader keeps saying when he keeps saying, I don't want nuclear weapons. I find it very striking. I mean, I talk in the book about this, I talk about the fatwa. Frankly, I think the fatwa is nonsense, but what I find interesting is that the Supreme Leader keeps going on about the fatwa. That, to me, is really interesting and what it

says to me is he's kind of gotten the fact that what President Obama has said, you know, my red line is weaponization. The Supreme Leader gets that too and he's not thinking about crossing that last threshold, and as I argue in the book, there is a world of difference between Iran, even with a breakout capability, and Iran with an actual arsenal.

MS. WRIGHT: In the back.

MR. THOMAS: Thank you. Jesse Thomas, unaffiliated at the moment. Two-part question, what would be a logical U.S. response to an Israeli attack? And what is the response we would be likely to see?

MS. WRIGHT: Attack on what?

MR. POLLACK: On Iran, I assume? On the Iranian nuclear program? First, I'll start with the response I think we're likely to see, which will give me time to decide on what I think -- what it should be. Again, we've done multiple simulations here at Brookings looking at an Israeli strike on Iran and I am really struck by, pardon the pun, the fact that our American teams have been very consistent in their response and, you know, we've had teams that were wholly liberal groups of people and mixed groups and more conservative groups and the response has been very consistent across those different groups and the response is typically to say, ah, geeze, we really wish you'd not done this, but you did. We will be there for your defense. If this causes Iranian retaliation, we will help

you protect yourself however you possibly can. In the meantime, we'd really like you to put your guns back in their holsters and wait and let us see if we can't bring this thing to an end before things get really out of hand, before you and the Iranians get into a much bigger war, before Iran withdraws from the nonproliferation treaty and throws out the inspectors, before the sanctions collapse, before all kinds of other bad things might happen.

And I suspect that is how most American administrations will respond. I do find it striking that you've had both, now, the Bush Administration and the Obama Administration saying directly to the Israelis, do not strike. It would not be in your interest, it would not be in our interest for you to strike.

And, again, I think the Israelis understand that. I think -- you know, my conversations, even with the most hawkish Israelis is always they get the fact that they should not be the ones to strike. Their priority list is very much: get a deal with the Iranians that ends their nuclear program. If you can't do that, you guys strike. And then third on their list, and it's down here, is we strike.

They understand the problems that they face and that's why they would much rather have these other two things going on.

How will we respond or how should we respond? Well,

obviously it's going to depend very much on the circumstances. Were they provoked? I think that plays an important role. Did the Iranians hit them first? What's the context otherwise? But I will say that I think that the response of our various American teams was a pretty good one. I don't think that we want a wider war between Israel and Iran. I don't think that we should be involving ourselves in it. Again, that's one of the reasons why I went back and I really worked through this question of what would a U.S. military strike on Iran and the war that might follow look like.

And, by the way, you know, both in government and out -- Dick Clarke used to talk about this, not the world's youngest teenager, but Richard Clarke, the former counterterrorism czar that, you know, we've war-gamed the U.S.-Iran war any number of times in the U.S. government now, it rarely comes out well for anyone involved, and I've been part of those as well, but I wanted to work through this one more time and again found that to me the costs and risks just don't pay off.

So, the idea that the Israelis strike and we, you know, jump on board, again, doesn't necessarily make sense to me.

What makes sense to me is we have to protect Israel; we have to help them to defend themselves. We should try to diffuse the situation as best we can so that things don't spread, either to higher levels, either vertical escalation or horizontal escalation, and that we can

bring this thing to a close without losing the key pieces that we need to keep Iran contained and keep it from building a nuclear arsenal -- the inspections, the sanctions, et cetera.

MS. WRIGHT: Let me take two questions. Mark, right here and then over here.

SPEAKER: Hi Ken.

MR. POLLACK: I'm girding my loins here, Mark. Okay, hit me.

SPEAKER: No, no. I actually agree with you on the majority of what you're saying about containment. But one of the elements, as Robin was talking about, in the issue is what does containment really look like? You talked about defense, the fact that we'd have sufficient capabilities in the region, but one of the other significant elements of containment has been the mutual security guaranties we've offered to our allies. I haven't read your book yet. That was a significant element of what was successful, and to my view, has been successful with the North Koreans, certainly in Europe. When you go back to Robin's point about an emboldened Iran potentially using nuclear diplomacy against Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, so on and so forth, it seems to be a much more compelling argument if Iran goes to Crown Prince Salman and says, why don't you just ask the Americans to leave? They've been the source of the problem.

And wouldn't things be better if we just made this sort of a nuclear-free zone?

That's the kind of nuclear emboldenment that I'd be concerned about, and Crown Prince Salman certainly will have a different answer if he's got a mutual security guaranty with the United States than if he doesn't.

So, did you discuss that aspect at all of containment?

MR. POLLACK: Do you want to take another question or should I just answer -- that's a great question.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, that's a big question.

MR. POLLACK: That's a great question and I do discuss it absolutely head on there. Just a couple quick points.

SPEAKER: So, I've got to buy the book?

MR. POLLACK: I'm going to just tease you, Mark, that's all, but yes, you've got to buy the book.

Point number one, you know, again we've got a lot of very good historical and academic literature on this. Nuclear diplomacy really doesn't work. We've never seen anyone actually be able to make that thing work. You know, there are some weird cases where it may have had a little bit of an aspect, but it was always an add-on to something else. That's point number one.

Point number two, though, is, you know, I think what you're getting at is this larger issue that Robin raised as well, and I made the point about Dennis Healey, how do you reassure your allies as opposed to how do you deter your foes? And, you know, the point that I make there in the book is twofold. One is, we actually -- and this is the point that I just made -- we actually have everything that's necessary to deter the Iranians from doing the kinds of things that we can deter them from and that, quite frankly, that our allies ought to be fearful of.

But there is this psychological dimension and, you know, what I say -- and I specifically discuss the issue of defense treaties and what I say in discussing this and the possibility of maybe some incremental additional forces in the region is, look, at the end of the day we don't know what it's going to take to reassure our allies, and it's going to require -- and, you know, you've been part of these conversations. It's going to require us to go out to the Gulf States and say, what do we have to do to make you feel comfortable? What do we have to do to make you feel that we are going to defend you?

And I don't quite know what they're going to say. They may come back and say, we want a treaty. And if that's the case, I'd be all in favor of it.

The one other point that I'd make there though is that I do

think that that's very different from the Iranian perspective because I think from the Iranian perspective, I think they've got all the evidence that they need that we will defend these states. I mean, you know, after all, we have come to -- we came to their defense in 1987, you know, we launched the largest U.S. military operation since Vietnam in 1991 to retake Kuwait. We are constantly pushing back on the Iranians in the Gulf. We've got forces all over the region. We have defended Israel on any number of occasions in a whole variety of different ways. I don't think there's any doubt in the minds of the Iranians that if they attack Israel or Saudi Arabia or even Bahrain, they are going to be facing us.

But I think you're right, it's just like the Germans during the Cold War, that what it takes to reassure them may be different from what it takes to deter the Iranians and the Soviets.

MS. WRIGHT: I can't resist saying, you know, treaties with some of the most undemocratic regimes in the world just doesn't strike me as a great long-term investment. You know, it sounds like a great idea if you're dealing with the Iran dimension of this challenge, but it makes me very nervous as a long-term strategy.

One more question and then we -- okay.

SPEAKER: I believe that thinking Iran would never use the bomb is exactly how you bring about strategic surprise, and there are two

more Machiavellian options that you didn't list in addition to your five. I believe you could declare immediately a mutually assured destruction regime. That might be powerful enough to actually discourage completion of the bomb. And second of all, I think you can resort to daily, relentless, covert operations to degrade the technical capabilities of Iran and stop the completion of the project that way.

Israel had some considerable success in this regard in Egypt in the 1960s and it's a good model.

MS. WRIGHT: Go for it.

MR. POLLACK: I think those are good interesting points. Again, I deal with them in the book. There's not a whole lot I don't deal with in the book.

MR. WRIGHT: Have you ever seen anybody who's a better salesman for his book?

MR. POLLACK: I'll just very quickly say that I think in some ways your two points are linked and, you know, again, we don't really know why the Iranians have decided not to bring their nuclear program to completion. They could -- the Israelis were scared, and I think for good reason, that in 2007 the Iranians were going to sprint to get a bomb and they didn't. And, again, when you talk to the really knowledgeable Israelis, they will say, that's a really important thing to keep in mind and that's a

very important piece of data that we have to keep in mind. I think that is absolutely the case.

There is something that is preventing the Iranians from going the nine yards, there is something out there that they are unsure of or don't want to have happen, and I don't think we quite know, but I think there are four different possibilities. One is that we or the Israelis will strike them, that's a definite possibility. A second one is that the Saudis would acquire a nuclear weapon themselves; that's a definite possibility. A third one, and now we're coming to the things I think are in some ways the most interesting, are that the Chinese and the Indians and perhaps the Russians as well would join our sanctions, because the Chinese in particular have been very good with the Iranians in saying to them, we don't want the Americans or the Israelis to bomb you, but we do not want you to have nuclear weapons.

And of course, remember China was critical in coming on board with Resolution 1929 imposing the harshest sanctions on Iran and they did it because the Iranians weren't being serious enough about the negotiations and I think that, you know, one of the most important things that we ought to be doing, it's something that Bob Einhorn has been talking about, I've been talking about, we really ought to be doing now is getting the Russians, the Chinese, the Indians on board with the idea that

if Iran ever does look like it is sprinting for a nuclear weapon, they're going to join the sanctions, because I think that's a big one.

The last one is what you just raised, which is covert action. I think the U.S. government has been doing a fair amount on covert action, certainly a lot on cyber. I think there's more that we could be doing in more traditional realms of covert action, but I also thing, you know, in my mind, that is another piece that we ought to be making very clear to the Iranians. And I suspect that it is one of the things that has been keeping Khamenei from going that last distance.

Remember, Khamenei is terrified, paranoid that we are trying to overthrow him but that we're only using part of our ability to do so. And I think that what terrifies him is that he, I suspect, believes that if he ever did try to get a nuclear weapon, we would go all out in our covert action. And part of my argument there is, that's a really important deterrent, and we ought to bolster his sense that if he ever did make that sprint for a weapon, we would go all out in covert action and try to bring him down however we could.

MS. WRIGHT: I promised I would give you enough time to sell your book and also to inscribe your book to your many friends here. So, please join me in wishing Ken well with his book and thanking him for his presentation.

(Applause)

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## CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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