

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY

**AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE:
“THE IMAM RETURNED: THIRTY YEARS OF REVOLUTION IN IRAN”**

**INTRODUCTION:
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**REMARKS BY
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MICHAEL RUBIN: Public diplomacy towards Iran is one of the defining issues right now. There's any number of debates about how the United States can refine public diplomacy and how the United States can get its message out, both to – diplomatically and also more importantly at a grass-roots level and so forth. So I was thrilled when Jeffrey Gedmin, the president of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, agreed to come and give our lunch keynote today. For those of you who don't know Jeffrey Gedmin, who's sitting right next to me, he has a long and distinguished career.

He ran the New Atlantic Initiative at the American Enterprise Institute before moving on to be the president of the Aspen Institute in Germany and for the last couple years he has been the president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which of course included the Persian-language service Radio Farda. And without further ado, I'm going to call on Jeffrey Gedmin to give us his thoughts on public diplomacy and so forth for the next half-hour or so.

(Audio break.)

JEFFREY GEDMIN: Michael, thank you very much. It is a pleasure to be here and I want to thank Michael Rubin for running this beautiful conference and his assistance, Ahmad, and the other staff. I know it's a lot of moving parts and I appreciate being here. Thanks to American Enterprise Institute, where I once worked. Welcome to C-SPAN and the C-SPAN audience.

It seems to me, Michael, that you flattered me by giving me the podium at lunch, but you also embarrassed me a little bit because I think I'm the only person in the room who is not an Iran expert, which does put me at some disadvantage. But I do think about Iran and I think about public diplomacy and I work with Iranians in Prague so with that maybe I have something to share with you.

As Michael said, I've been with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty now almost two years and when I began I had been on the job just a couple months when we had a kidnapping. It was a kidnapping of one of our journalists in Baghdad, a 29-year-old woman, who was a cultural reporter. And in the days and couple weeks, actually, that followed, we had intense negotiations and assistance with the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, with the U.S. State Department, with the Pentagon here, with other embassies, human rights groups, a number of other actors to win the freedom of this woman, which we did succeed in – she was freed.

But almost immediately, when she was picked up she was on her way to work, being driven by a neighbor, who was shot, by the way – the neighbor driving was immediately shot and killed and the body thrown in a ditch – she, Jumana, while in captivity – almost immediately her Iranian colleagues in Prague came to me and said they suspected an Iranian hand behind this.

You know, one might react first by saying good heavens, this sounds far-fetched, emotional, maybe typically conspiratorial, if I may say that about the Middle East. But it is the case that in 2006 and 2007 there was a spate of kidnappings. Just to remind you how severe the wave was, at one point someone in the American Embassy in Baghdad told me that were looking good – kidnappings were down to about 50 a day. Fifty a day. And, by all accounts, there seemed to be some Iranian connections because the Iranians had been and still support insurgents in Iraq, both Shia and Sunni.

And in this particular case we'd had an Iranian journalist from our station called Radio Farda – Radio Tomorrow – detained inside Iran and the interrogators had leveled quite an explicit threat right before this kidnapping of the Iraqi colleague. The interrogators in Tehran told our colleague – our radio journalist – when you return to Prague, stop reporting about domestic news. If you want to report, report about light international news. But if you report about domestic news and you try to find our pressure points, we will find yours. And so my colleagues in Prague concluded well, they're looking for our pressure points and not just here in Prague and not just inside Iran, but perhaps even inside Iraq. Who knows? We don't know exactly who took Jumana, but there was speculation.

Earlier this week in Prague – I flew in last night – we had a senior Afghan official visit us and visit our Afghan service. During the conversation over breakfast I asked him, Mr. Minister, what is the role Iran is playing in Afghanistan today? And the first thing he did was smile and he said which Iran, in a reference to the multiple voices that we've heard about this morning, Michael – multiple actors inside that political landscape. He said, if you mean the Revolutionary Guard, quite a destructive role: They continue to finance, continue to aid, continue to assist insurgents, including the Taliban.

Well, it seems to me that of all the debates in Washington, D.C., about what to do with Iran and what's happening in Iran and what Iranian behavior means for us, two things are certain: First of all, that Dennis Ross is right when he says that this current government in Iran threatens American interests throughout the region, including Iraq, including Afghanistan. I think it's also true, I believe, that while the timing is in dispute, the new administration and President Obama in one way or another is going to engage in a different way – in a more robust way the Islamic Republic.

So in my judgment, that begs two questions: With which Iran are we going to speak? What part of Iran are we going to engage and what are going to talk about? And I have two fervent hopes. The first is that we do not speak merely and exclusively to the government of Iran. I think it's absolutely vital that we speak to and listen to the Iranian people. And the second thing is – whatever this new approach entails, whatever this rapprochement is all about – that it ought to be a comprehensive approach. I was interested in hearing the new American president on an Arabic-language television station earlier this week say that the approach of the United States to the Middle East should be holistic and I think the approach to Iran should be comprehensive and holistic.

And to that three points: First of all, most obviously, the United States government has in mind a conversation – a negotiation with the Islamic Republic's government on how to halt its

pursuit of nuclear weapons. Nothing is probably more important than this. And it's been said and stated and formulated, but I think it always bears repeating that nuclear weapons in the hands of this government – in the hands of these men who rule Iran today would mean a change of balance of power in the region, would almost certainly ignite a dangerous destabilizing arms race, would certainly provide terrorists with the protection of a nuclear umbrella and would definitively pose an existential threat to Israel.

I don't think there's anything more important than any kind of conversation, negotiation, incentive or disincentive package that persuades this government to stop its progress and campaign to acquire nuclear weapons. But there are other things.

Second, I think the new administration would be well advised to engage the Islamic republic about its behavior in the region as it affects our interests and the interests of our allies. That's Afghanistan, that's Iraq and that's support for terrorist groups like Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas. I think that you could have the most brilliant, tenacious, sophisticated, subtle, penetrating diplomacy in the world – I don't think there will ever be peace between Israelis and Palestinians when a country like Iran finances and supports and promotes terrorism.

Third, I think it's important in this comprehensive approach that the United States have a robust, serious think about how we support human rights, civil society and democracy. There's a quote by Ronald Reagan that I'm fond of from a speech that Ronald Reagan gave during his first term at Georgetown University here in Washington, D.C. Reagan said, quote, "All Americans share two great goals" in our "foreign policy: a safer world and a world in which individual rights can be respected and precious values may flourish." Reagan went on to say these values may be "cherished by us," but "they do not belong exclusively to us"; they were not, in quotation marks, "made in America," close quote. Now, I think that was true during the Cold War, I think it's true today, I think it's true for Republicans, I think it's true for Democrats and I think that kind of quote could have easily come from the new president of the United States, President Obama.

I think in engaging the people of Iran we need an approach that is as rich, as varied, as multilateral and, if I may add, as bottom-to-top as humanly possible and conceivable. And a parenthesis about that: What I'm not advocating today is a new, intensified hunt for the moderates inside the Iranian government; that's not what I'm talking about. Not to say that moderates don't exist – and we heard that this morning – the Iranian government is not a monolith. I'm aware of that. But it is a government that, again, as we noted on a number of panels this morning, exceptionally opaque. We have a terrible tradition of identifying moderates.

The tradition and attempt goes back to the – (chuckles) – Reagan administration and sometimes the results have been quite embarrassing. Do you remember in the early 1990s in Berlin in a Greek restaurant called Mykonos four Kurdish Iranian dissidents were gunned down – they were murdered? And by the end of the decade a German court – this was at the height of critical dialogue and Europe's efforts to engage Iran and speak to Iran and identify and work with moderates – by the end of the decade a German court had found that in that execution – in that murder of those four dissidents, the so-called liquidation order went to the top of the Iranian government and was explicitly supported and signed by then-President Rafsanjani.

Well, we've heard his name invoked this morning and in some Washington circles and in many European circles he's one of the famous and desirable moderates. Well, maybe, but these things are surely quite relative. I prefer as a compass the kind of thinking that Nick Burns left us with when he left the State Department at the end of the last administration. Nick Burns, the undersecretary for political affairs, who said today, in Iran the critical divide is not between moderates and hard-liners, the critical divide is between society in general and the ruling class.

So I would suggest to you yes, let's engage the government on nuclear issues – absolutely critical. Let's engage this ruling class on regional issues, but let's also do whatever we can to engage and listen to the Iranian people: I think it's soft power; I think it's smart power; I think it's common sense.

Now, what do I mean by that? A number of things: Number one, I think that we ought to engage the Europeans. The Europeans have had a problem with the way the United States deals with Iran for years and now we have a moment and Europe likes smart power, Europe likes human rights, Europe actually likes the new American president – I think it's a golden opportunity to tell the Europeans please now finally step up.

Engagement is not only about commerce; it's not merely about multinational corporate interests. There are a range of things that we could look to the Europeans to do: great human rights traditions within the Green Parties, some instances within social democratic parties; the German foundations have a fantastic tradition of helping civil society from Portugal to southern Africa. I think we should engage them. What else do I think? I think it's important to engage trade unions. I'm aware that there's not much yet in the way of trade-union movement inside Iran. I think there are a couple and they're weak and they have very little connection to the outside world.

You have to start somewhere. I think this new administration in Washington should engage environmentalists. There are some environmental NGOs in Iran – again, nascent; again, underdeveloped; again, weak. You have to start somewhere. I would push the Europeans. Good heavens, the German Green Party is keenly interested and concerned about the Iranian nuclear program and would be a wonderful interlocutor for a number of Iranians on environmental issues. I think that the Europeans should be involved; we should push environmental issues.

I think we should push cultural dialogue, exchange and cultural diplomacy. I met recently in London with the chief curator of a major British museum who had organized a small visit of some British curators to Tehran to explore the idea of museum exchanges. Their visas were denied; the opportunity to travel was cut off. I think that Americans and Europeans and others – there's just an immense amount that could be done, also in the area of film, which Iranians take great pride in; also in the area of literature.

There was a documentary on Iranian television recently where experts sat around a table discussing Harry Potter and the conclusion of the experts on national television in Iran was that Harry Potter is a nefarious Zionist plot aimed at world domination and subjugation of Iran. I

have a strong intuition that there's some Iranians who would dispute that thesis: I think we should engage them; we should hear from them; we should listen to them.

I think we should promote educational ties, business ties – I'm not naïve about these things. Good heavens, I recall the kinds of educational exchange that took place during the Soviet Union. I remember once being in line at the Moscow Airport during the Gorbachev era. There was a school group from Minneapolis and they had trees that they were coming to plant in Moscow and I guess the friendship society of the Soviet Union and the communist youth group would go to Minneapolis would go to Minneapolis and plant trees.

Well, these things are used and abused and manipulated and regulated, but I think on balance – and we heard numerous times today how young the Iranian population is – on balance the more exchange, the more contact, the more Iranians who can get out of the country, the more people we can send there has a positive effect.

I said business – I'm not for the unqualified and unconditional lifting of sanctions; I think sanctions have a place. But I am for the vigorous review of sanctions and wherever we can think about smart sanctions, because my understanding is, in Iran there is an entrepreneurial class, there's a technocratic class that is keenly interested in contact with the West, exchange with the West and it's stifled right now; it's stymied; it's suffocated.

I would promote everything I can – do everything I can to promote and support the rich activity of Western NGOs that try to connect to, listen to, talk to, have dialogue with Iranian civil society: that's Freedom House; that's the National Endowment for Democracy; in Paris it's Reporters Without Borders; I mentioned in Germany it's the Stiftungen – it's the German foundations.

I would engage Iranians outside of the country, many of whom are in this room today. I've been out to Los Angeles a couple times to meet with Iranians out there; I've been to Paris; I've been to London; I've been to Berlin. Openly in this room we can say that the Iranian community outside the country has a reputation of sometimes, shall we say, being divided. There's suspicion, there's acrimony – there are Iranians in this room laughing right now; I guess I touched a cord. It doesn't matter, because we either include you Iranians in this process or you will include yourselves anyway and I prefer by invitation.

I would do everything we can, by the way, to promote religious exchange. I don't know if you noted here in the United States, but over Christmas Channel 4 in Britain offered its so-called alternative message to Mr. Ahmadinejad and argued that this was the way that you show tolerance and diversity and intellectual curiosity. My own view of that is – and I am for, being the president of Radio Free Europe I guess I should be for freedom of the press and freedom of speech – my own view is, on those things, yes, have an open mind, but not so open your brains fall out. An alternative Christmas message from President Ahmadinejad seems to me odd but nevertheless, if he wants to speak to us let's listen and let's speak back.

I would propose as many exchanges and conferences and seminars and symposia. I would include Muslims and Christians and Jews and Baha'is to say we want to listen and we want to learn and we want a rich dialogue with this country and with this society.

You know, there's a lot written these days about the importance of the blogosphere inside Iran. Depending on who you listen to or what you read, Iranians are either the second-leading bloggers in the world or the third or the fourth, but the top five. And they're big, big bloggers. Well, I'm also told that if you look at what they blog about, religion happens to be an extremely popular, controversial issue: The role of religion in society. I would engage on that.

I would engage on women's issues. I can't think of anybody better-placed than the new secretary of state and her State Department to engage on women's issues. It's a nascent movement; it's an underdeveloped movement. It's a movement inside Iran that doesn't have full coherence and I think it has immense potential for us to listen and learn and to contribute in whatever way we can.

I would also say that if you're interested in building civil society and having such a rich and varied dialogue, you have to think about minorities. Iran has minorities, one being the Azeri minority. Again, depending on what estimate, between 25 and 30 percent and by some estimates 20 and 25 percent of the population are Azeri. They play important roles in government, important roles in economy but they do not – some of them – feel that they have the autonomy and the rights that they would like as a minority group. It's not about separatism: That's not in our interest and I don't think that's what they're pursuing either, but minority issues.

I would suggest that we also find ways to help people inside the country find their own voice and I don't know what kind of support that means, but I think it's a valuable thing and I wouldn't shy away from it. I'm fully aware that we had this little controversy the last few years about President Bush and this \$75 million that the State Department wanted to use to support democracy in Iran. And it was widely criticized by everybody: by Shirin Ebadi, the Nobel Prize winner; by dissidents inside the country; by Iranians outside the country; by NGOs; by human-rights groups. It was said to be counterproductive; it was said to be dangerous; it was said to be meddling; some people said it was just poor timing – this is the Ahmadinejad era, we should have thought of this before when the reformists were in power.

I have to tell you: I don't find any of that very convincing. In April 2000, before George W. Bush was elected and a reformist president was in power, a small group of intellectuals traveled from Iran to Berlin – this was the Berlin of soft power, engagement, critical dialogue. They went to participate in a conference organized by the German Green Party – not exactly the militaristic part of the German political landscape. They came to talk about things like secularism and constitutional reform and they went home and they were arrested and they were imprisoned in 2000. And at that time, do you know some people blamed the Germans and the German Greens? What a provocative thing to invite Iranian intellectuals to Berlin. Well, if you will, okay; but in 1999 – the year before – there was a crackdown on media in Iran during this reformist period; there was violent suppression of demonstrations at universities during this reformist period. It seems to me that if we reach out on a strictly voluntary basis and help those who wish our help they will be endangered and the regime will target them and that's a problem.

If we do nothing the regime will go after them, they will be endangered and they will have problems.

We do know this: We know that whatever happens inside Iran is a choice of the Iranian people and it will be driven from inside Iran. But I think we also know that it's fair and reasonable when people inside this country wish a dialogue with us, information from us, intellectual nourishment, moral solidarity – I think it's fair and reasonable to say, yes, we'd be happy to participate.

We did this in South Africa; we did it in Eastern Europe; we did it in the Soviet Union; we're trying to do it today in places like Belarus and Burma; it's hard for me to understand why Iran would be the one single exemption where we say, no, not for us; too dangerous for us and them; we don't participate.

Final point: It seems to me – and this is self-serving, Michael – but it seems to me that broadcasting does play a role and should play a role as well and I'd be happy to say something about this.

I think it's terribly important that BBC does what it does and in my view BBC Persian for its Iranian audience offers a vital window on the world. I think it's important that Voice of America does what it does. If BBC provides a window on the world, Voice of America provides an American perspective – a U.S. perspective that apparently Iranians want and need. And then there's what we do – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and our Persian-language station called Radio Farda – we're not a window but we're a kind of mirror and we try our best to focus on domestic news and developments that Iranians wouldn't need if they had a fully fair, free and independent media.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty today is broadcasting in 28 languages in 20 countries: to Russia, to the Caucasus, to Central Asia, to Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran. We're not doing propaganda; we're not doing psychological operations; we're providing news and information and it seems to work. I mentioned Afghan – Afghanistan, our Afghan service and a visit we had from Kabul earlier this week. In Afghanistan, where we're permitted a bureau and freedom of movement, we have 60 percent market share, we broadcast in Dari and Pashto and we have impact, I'd like to suggest.

Sometimes it's dramatic. We've had two instances since I've been on this job where suicide bombers have called into our stations saying I want out and I don't know how to get out and I'm in a – (chuckles) – very dangerous position here and I didn't know who to call. Sometimes it's not so dramatic but I think it's equally profound.

Last week we took a call on our – it's called Radio Azadi – Radio Freedom in Afghanistan – we took a call from a gentleman who is representing a group of students at the University of Kabul. They're all disabled and he said we have a problem: We're expected next week to take exams but the exams are being held on a higher – (chuckles) – floor in the university building and there's no access – there's no wheelchair access, there's no elevator. At

which point a government official called our station, said sorry, we'll fix it; we'll make sure that the exams are held on the first floor.

It fosters debate. I can tell you that one of my favorite letters that Radio Afghanistan – Radio Azadi – has received – they get e-mail, phone calls, bags of mail every week – was written by a 12-year-old boy from one of the provinces. The letter is one piece of paper; if you unroll it it's about 20 feet long – 20 feet long – with art kind of done by pencil and crayon. And I don't know what the letter says – all 20 feet – but I have had bits translated to me. One of my colleagues said well, here's a piece. He talks – the 12-year-old boy – he talks about the role of women. You know what he says? He says women are our sisters, our mothers and our wives. Women tame the wild horses – that's us boys and men. Always treat women with dignity and respect. Things like this, I think, foster debate, stimulate discussion, promote respectful dissent and add an immeasurable contribution to developments in these societies.

A final word about Farda, the Persian service: It doesn't have the advantages of the Afghan service; we're not permitted a bureau inside Iran; the Web site is blocked; the signals for the radio are jammed; the journalists are threatened. And still there's an audience, there's e-mails, there's phone calls – we can get as many as 500 SMS text messages from Iranians throughout the country overnight.

There's much more that could be done. I regret, by the way, that BBC Persian – positively – has moved to Persian television this past couple of weeks and the government of Iran has declared it illegal. It's the right sort of thing to do. Final point: 10 days ago – 11 days ago in Iran, you may have noticed – it was reported here – two doctors who were revolutionizing HIV prevention inside the country – they had been arrested in June – they've been sentenced to prison: three years, six years, respectively. There are rumors that they are in solitary confinement; there are rumors that they are being forced to sign confessions.

They're accused of trying to overthrow the government. You know what the principal charge against them is? You know what these two men were doing? They were trying to get other doctors and athletes and professionals from culture and education to visit the West and visit the United States. And as the Iranian news service put it, to destabilize the government and convince Iranians that the Americans are the savior of us all.

Well, they'll come here; they'll see we're the savior of nothing and we have to save ourselves. But it would be a very good conversation to have. I think these are exactly the kind of people that we have to find means and mechanisms to speak to, listen to, assist and support. Thank you very much.

(END)