



NUCLEAR STANDOFF TALKS KEY WITH IRAN, EXPERT SAYS

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Correction: CLARIFICATION PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 7, 2006 -- * Trita Parsi, an expert on U.S.-Iranian relations, said a "powerful" Iran might become a stabilizing power in the Middle East. Because of a reporter's error, a story on Page A3 of Friday's Dispatch incorrectly linked Iran's nuclear program to his statement.

The U.S. should pursue a diplomatic approach to Iran as that country emerges as a Middle East power, a former U.S. government adviser said in Columbus yesterday.

"I think, unfortunately, the risk for a military confrontation is very great," Trita Parsi said after addressing the Columbus Council on World Affairs. "But when you have this amount of tension, the risk for miscalculating is huge if you don't have dialogue."

Parsi, born in Iran and raised in Sweden, earned his doctorate in the United States. He has been published in academic and popular journals and has appeared on BBC World News and the PBS NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.

He also is the author of *Treacherous Triangle: The Secret Dealings of Iran, Israel and the United States*.

In his speech at the Columbus Athletic Club, Parsi struck a tempered approach gained from 130 interviews with Israeli, Iranian and U.S. officials.

He said the United States had a schizophrenic relationship with Iran, which was our ally in Afghanistan and the 1991 Persian Gulf War, but is now consigned to "axis of evil" status.

Iran, he notes, is capable of economic and military independence and would prefer diplomatic relations with the United States. If spurned, however, he predicted it will align with China and Russia.

He said the U.S. strategy in Iran of nuclear containment and regime change is counter to our long-term regional interests. He suggested an atomic Iran, given diplomatic incentives, might become a stabilizing influence in a rough neighborhood.

Iran yesterday announced it had tested a Shahab-3 ballistic missile capable of delivering warheads 1,243 miles, within range of major Israeli cities and U.S. forces in the region.

The news chilled Gideon Shalom Vennor, a Jewish Agency for Israel ambassador serving a three-year posting to Columbus.

"I'm always looking for reasons to be an optimist," Vennor said after the speech. "I would like to see a world in which Israel lives in security with its neighbors, including Iran. I think his talk today offers some reason for hope."

But Vennor noted that in Israel, the remarks of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad reignite fears of the 1930s.

"We have a leader of a fundamentalist regime who is openly calling for the destruction of Israel and is assembling the means to do it," Vennor said. "To explain the Iranian rhetoric as part of a wider geopolitical strategy, we in Israel cannot afford to view such statements by Iranian leadership lightly."

But Parsi said the U.S. empowered Iran by taking out its rivals: the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

"We would accomplish more through cooperation than confrontation and containment," he said, noting other countries are watching how we handle Iran.

Dr. Peter Hahn, a professor of history at Ohio State University who specializes in the Middle East, agreed.

"Indeed, I believe Iran has come of age," Hahn said. "And I would agree with (Parsi's) suggestion that the U.S. has not played its diplomatic cards as skillfully as it might have."

Parsi returns to Washington today after speaking at a public forum at 2 p.m at the St. Thomas More Newman Center, 64 W. Lane Ave.

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