

Report recommends controversial American-Iranian policy changes

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A new report (http://thinkprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/IranReport_091112_ExecutiveSummary.pdf) published by The Iran Project on Sept. 13 and signed by University professor and former U.S. ambassador to Egypt and Israel Daniel Kurtzer has proposed controversial policy changes, including maintenance of an appropriately sized army in the Gulf and negotiations with Iran to limit its nuclear power.

The Iran Project is a non-governmental organization seeking to dissolve American-Iranian differences.

The report, titled “Weighing the Benefits and Costs of Military Action Against Iran,” has 32 signatories ranging from diplomats to military and intelligence officers. The report recommends that the United States coerce Iran into nuclear cooperation using “a two-track approach of pressure and incentives” and recommends a further increase of sanctions should this approach fail.

Kurtzer, who has spent 29 years in the U.S. Foreign Service, said that American-Iranian ties are an important issue worth devoting time to. He noted that data collection in the report was quite challenging.

“Iran’s democracy is less than open in many senses,” he said. “A lot of information about Iranian thinking and hard data is hard to find.”

Dr. Paul Pillar, a member of The Iran Project and former chief of analytic units at the CIA covering portions of the Near East, the Persian Gulf and South Asia, said he believes the project will be successful because it is a carefully laid analysis of pros and cons from experts committed to diplomacy. However, he also said that even if Iranian cooperation does occur, the process of implementing the recommendations would be slow because trust would have to be built between Washington and Tehran.

The report, however, has been deemed controversial. Seyed Hossein Mousavian, an associate research scholar at the Program on Science and Global Security at the Wilson School and a former diplomat for Iran in its nuclear negotiations with the international community, explained that sanctions are not likely to be successful because Iran is the nation with the most expertise in resisting sanctions in history.

“After 35 years of draconian unilateral and multilateral sanctions, Iran is the most powerful and stable country in the Middle East, despite American contributions to its allies in the region,” Mousavian said. “The Americans can try this policy for the next five to 10 years, but Iran will be the winner.”

Mousavian added that the nuclear issue between Iran and the United States is political rather than technical and can only be solved by political discourse. He noted that the United States and other Western nations were the ones that initiated nuclear planning and encouraged enrichment in Iran in the first place.

Iran has long been ready for a confidence building period with the United States and a commitment to transparency in exchange for respect of its nuclear rights and the lifting of sanctions, Mousavian said. He added, however, that Americans’ desire to keep sanctions for many years will be a hindrance to this transparency.

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