

National Conversation: Should the United States Change,
Contain, or Engage Nuclear "Outliers" Iran and North Korea?

Jane Harman

Good morning, good afternoon. I'm Jane Harman, the not-so-new president and CEO of the Wilson Center. I'm very happy to be at this end of Pennsylvania Avenue and to welcome you today. I'd also especially want to welcome our board chairman, Ambassador Joe Gildenhorn, his wife Alma Gildenhorn, who's a member of our council and other council members.

[applause]

Yes, let's applaud them. You are only half the audience. The other half is in overflow rooms in this building and I think many are listening live or watching live, some of the new features that we offer at the Wilson Center. And today it is my pleasure to announce that we have joined forces with NPR to host this yearlong public event series, which we call The National Conversation. For each of these events going forward, an esteemed NPR journalist, like our friend Steve Inskeep, who has changed his outfit from what I'm sure was pretty rugged wear in the Middle East just last week, will moderate the discussion. Our hope is that this series will provide the public with new opportunities to engage in much needed civil discourse, free from spin, in the safe political space of the Wilson Center. I only wish, as I hinted before, that such conversations occurred about a mile from here, up on a hill.

Today's event asks if the U.S. should change, contain, or engage nuclear outliers, Iran and North Korea. It coincides with the launch of a book called "Outlier States" by Rob Litwak, the Wilson Center's own vice president for scholars. And by the way, if you would like to, please buy it; it's outside somewhere. And it's also on a table with a lot of other recent publications by the Wilson Center. Joining Rob today are two of journalism's best. Steve Inskeep and Tom Friedman are both well-known rock stars.

Tom, who got overdressed for this event, is a New York Times Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist and author. We told him black tie, that's his version. My favorite book of his, still my favorite, after all these decades, is "From

Beirut to Jerusalem," still timely. And it was written when Tom was a fellow at the Wilson Center.

Steve is the distinguished host of NPR's "Morning Edition," the most widely heard radio news program in the United States, and certainly the most widely heard radio news program in the Harman household. As a personal Inskeep junkie, I know, as I mentioned, that he's just returned from a revolutionary road trip through the Middle East. I think his latest posting was from a bar in Cairo or at least beer was mentioned, talking to the author of an Egyptian humor blog.

The nuclear challenges that North Korea and Iran pose are both at critical junctures. I was in Seoul recently and tensions in the region remain high at North Korea's failed missile launch in April. Many observers now think North Korea has shelved its plan to do another nuclear weapons test, but its provocative threats to attack the ROK media sites and South Korean officials continue. In an election year, theirs, not just ours, South Korean presidential candidates will ratchet up the rhetoric. Seoul, with 24 million people, is within artillery range of the DMZ. The chance of miscalculation is high and the U.S., if it happened, U.S. and U.N. assets could be drawn into the conflict. We all know that this week, extensive talks with Iran in Moscow yielded no results. Many continue to claim that Iran is just buying time, time enough to overcome impediments to enriching uranium to achieve weapons-grade. Israel and others are running out of patience.

So, can the outliers be integrated into the international community? And how should the United States respond if outlier regimes refuse and continue to augment their nuclear capabilities? These are some of the questions that will be posed and hopefully answered today.

As mentioned, today's discussion is enriched by our new partnership with NPR. Gary Knell, who is right here, is NPR's new president and CEO. Gary and I have a lot in common. We're both policy geeks and we're both deeply committed to expanding and enriching debate on some of the toughest issues facing this country. We're also both Californians. I still live there, Gary still visits there. Like me, Gary was educated in the L.A. public school system, so you know, he must be very smart. Gary was recently honored by GenerationOn, the youth division of a

non-profit focused on inspiring and motivating kids through service. Gary was recognized for dedicating his 30 year career to using, quote, "the power of media to empower and education people of every age." As the former CEO of Sesame Street, Gary actually has his own Muppet. Now how cool is that? I hear that Gary, the Muppet, started accepting the award with a special shout-out to Elmo, Big Bird, and even Oscar, before Gary the human could make it to the podium. That is really cool. Gary led the international expansion of Sesame and both there, and at NPR, he has capitalized on every platform of media and every mode of storytelling to inform, educate, and engage the public. He's a real advocate of innovation, using new technologies and ideas to advance NPR's mission and to expand its audience. This partnership is a terrific example and we are trying our best at Wilson to do many of the same things. So please welcome, please join me in welcoming Gary the human, and hopefully in some future event, Gary the Muppet, Gary Knell.

[applause]

Gary Knell:

That was quite an introduction I have to say. It's great to be here and I have figured out that the Muppet will be testifying in the House Appropriations Committee later this year, so if we have any tough questions, we know who to send up. I have traded Big Bird in for Nina Totenberg or something like that. Out of -- actually, truthfully out of a belief of media as the most powerful educator at the end of the day. And whether it's educating small children throughout the world, including in some of the places in the Middle East and some other hotspots around the world where we launched and engage with many, many millions of kids around the world, to now being at NPR and having the privilege to work with this incredible group of journalists like Steve Inskeep and others, who take their craft seriously. As we live in a world now where the whole definition of news is being redefined, and as many, many young people getting their news from Google News and Twitter and Facebook, we have to think about what does this really mean for sourced, fact-checked, accurate news, as we live in a world today that is, we're going to need that civic civil dialogue more than ever, which is exactly why this partnership with the Wilson Center is so important.

And it really is my honor to be able to join here in common cause with Jane Harman. And Jane is modest, I think, about her own work, her work at the Foreign Policy Board, the Defense Policy Board, the CIA Board, the National Intelligence Board. Just been to Egypt and that wasn't enough so she had to fly off and see San Suu Kyi in Bangkok -- Aung San Suu Kyi in Bangkok -- to make sure that a proper greeting was held and an engagement about her coming out of Myanmar was important for Americans to be present at. Jane was a great leader in Congress. She wrote an incredible thing, "Escaping the Asylum," which I urge all of you to read, a memorable op-ed in Newsweek.

Non-partisan civil dialogue is what NPR is all about, and that's what the Wilson Center is all about. We've got 900 independent public radio stations around this country, trying exactly to do that, and trying to bring a national conversation. This is the second of many that we will be doing with the Wilson Center. And as Jane mentioned, we will be streaming this discourse through both the Wilson Center websites and on NPR.org. And we plan, in the future, to be able to do that not just on the website, but through mobile devices and in other places where we are seeing double-digit growth in terms of use. Every week, there's now, Jane, I read some 70 million tablet users in the United States, about to go to 125 million in the next two years. So this is a technology that's absolutely exploding and the now use of print, audio and visual all coming together, brings exactly this kind of dialogue, a powerful engine to try to bring Americans together to discuss the issues that are so important to all of us.

There's no one better at NPR than our "Morning Edition" host, Steve Inskeep, who welcomes millions of Americans, every single morning, getting up very early to come into NPR. "Morning Edition" has a bigger audience than the three morning news television network shows, combined. This is a big audience and it's a big audience of connected people who want to learn about the world, about commerce, about global affairs, and there's really no journalist in my book, who has a deeper interview style, someone who listens, pushes back, but in a respectful way, than Steve Inskeep. His "Revolutionary Road Trip," some 2,000 miles in a car, or I guess various cars, Jeeps, and other devices, over the last few weeks, which we coupled with a music soundtrack from the region. You should go on the

website and listen to the work that Steve did. It is a testament to the power of his work and of what NPR can be.

Tom Friedman really doesn't need much of an introduction. Tom, I've read every single one of your books, I think twice over. Pulitzer Prizes, a great spokesman and voice of common sense for America. And I'm most delighted to welcome now to the stage, I, really, the guest of honor, who's book is being published just today, "Outlier States," and it's someone who's been with the Wilson Center for three decades, and that is Dr. Rob Litwak. Rob, welcome, thank you.

[applause]

Robert Litwak:

Thank you and good afternoon. The -- when President Obama first described North Korea as outliers, senior White House aides confirmed that it was a calculated departure from the Bush-era term, rogue state. Rogue carried the connotation of a state who's ruling regime was essentially irredeemable. By contrast, the outlier rubric was intended to convey that a pathway was open for North Korea and Iran to rejoin the community of nations, if they came into compliance with their obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

To begin today's conversation, let me briefly trace the policy arc from rogue to outlier and examine its implications. Rogue state entered the U.S. foreign policy lexicon after the 1991 Gulf War. Saddam Hussein's Iraq was the rogue archetype, a regime pursuing weapons of mass destruction, and using terrorism as an instrument of state policy. The Clinton administration labeled the rogues, whose core group was Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and Libya as a distinct category of states in the post-Cold War international system. Rogue state was a unilateral American political concept without foundation in international law. For the Clinton administration, creating a category of states that were by definition, beyond the pale, complicated its ability to conduct normal diplomacy with them. Conservative critics castigated negotiations as a tantamount to appeasement. The administration eventually recognized that the term had become a political straightjacket, so it was dropped.

The Bush administration revived the rogue rubric before 9/11, but afterwards, the concept became central to the administration's response to those terrorist attacks. Threat was linked to the character or the rogue regimes. The nightmare scenario was that a rogue state such as Iraq might transfer a nuclear weapon to an undeterrable terrorist group such as al-Qaida. That redefinition of threat precipitated a fundamental shift in strategy, from a pre-9/11 emphasis on containment, to a post-9/11 emphasis on regime change. Regime change was viewed as the only way to transform rogue states, because their threatening behavior derived from their very nature. In short, to end rogue behavior, you had to change rogue regimes. That logic drove the Bush administration's decision to launch a preventive war of choice against Iraq, without the U.N. Security Council's legitimizing authorization. In December 2003, eight months after the fall of Baghdad, came the surprise announcement that Muammar Gaddafi had agreed to verifiable WMD disarmament. Although Bush administration officials claimed Libya as a dividend of the Iraq war, the crux of the deal was a tacit but clear security assurance. If Gaddafi gave up his WMD, Washington would eschew the objective of regime change.

With Iran and North Korea, the Bush administration was caught between the precedence set in Iraq and Libya. The administration could not replicate the Iraq precedent of direct military intervention and it was unwilling to offer Tehran and Pyongyang the security assurance that had sealed the Libya deal. The administration continually sent out a mixed message, never clarifying whether the U.S. policy goal was to replace regimes or to change their conduct. It was unclear whether the Bush administration was prepared to take yes for an answer. That is, to accept behavior change, rather than to insist on regime replacement.

Obama campaigned for the presidency on a controversial platform of negotiating with rogue states. The shift was evident in his inaugural address offer to extend a hand to adversaries if you are unwilling to unclench your fist. The Obama administration jettisoned regime change rhetoric. Instead, it reframed the challenges posed by North Korea and Iran in terms of their non-compliance with established international norms. President Obama offered adversarial governments a structured choice. Abide by international norms and thereby gain the economic benefits of greater integration with the international community, or remain in

non-compliance and thereby face international isolation and punitive consequences. The Obama administration clarified the Bush administration's mixed message, making clear its openness to a Libya-type agreement. But the outliers rebuffed the extended hand.

Critics of the Obama administration's engagement strategy asked whether Obama would take no for an answer. Both Pyongyang and Tehran seized on NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya as proof that Gaddafi had been duped by the West when he dismantled his nuclear program. North Korean officials stated that the 2000 agreement had been an invasion tactic to disarm the country, while Iran's supreme leader declared that U.S.-assisted regime change in Libya had validated Iran's decision not to retreat but to increase its nuclear facilities year after year, as he put it. With its regime takedowns in Iraq and Libya, Washington has essentially priced itself out of the security assurance market in Pyongyang and Tehran.

So here we are then, all options for dealing with the outliers may remain on the table, but none is good. The all options on the table formulation is usually a reference to the possibility of a military strike on Iran's nuclear program. That openly debated option, what would be the most telegraphed punch in history, runs up against three potential liabilities. First, it would at best, set back but not end the nuclear program. Second, it could well generate a nationalist backlash within Iran, with a perverse consequence of bolstering the clerical regime. And third, a limited attack on Iran's nuclear sites could escalate into a regional conflict. The case for a military strike on Iran's nuclear program rests on an assessment of the theocratic regime as undeterrable and apocalyptic. But that depiction of Iran is an irrational state, runs contrary to U.S. national security estimates that have characterized the clerical regime's decision making as being guided by a cost-benefit approach. The Obama administration has downplayed the military option, instead pushing for tough economic sanctions to effect Iranian decision making. The president has described the sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union as crippling and said that they've had the effect of virtually grinding the Iranian economy to a halt. Sanctions are widely credited with bringing the Iranian leadership back to the negotiating table.

But in tandem of course with diplomacy, the Obama administration has employed preventive, non-military instruments, most notably cyber attacks, to slow down Iran's nuclear attacks. Iran's ability to enrich uranium gives it an inherent hedge option for a nuclear weapon. U.S. intelligence analysts maintain that Iran has not yet decided to cross the threshold from a potential capability to an actual weapon. Indeed, the strategic ambiguity of a hedge, of going so far but no further, at least for now, might well serve Iranian interests. With Iran under the pressure of sanctions, President Obama has observed that the Tehran regime has the opportunity to make a strategic calculation that at the least, defers their decision to weaponize. But critics of the administration assert that given the character of the Iranian regime, allowing Iran to retain even a latent capability to acquire nuclear weapons constitutes an unacceptable threat.

Yet the hard reality is that the window in which a full rollback of Iran's and North Korea's nuclear capability was possible, has closed. Indeed North Korea has tested two nuclear weapons and now has a small arsenal. With that objective no longer obtainable, Washington should remain pragmatically open to diplomacy, backed by the coercive pressure of sanctions to establish limits on their nuclear programs. Bounding the two countries' programs would primarily entail curbing their acquisition of additional physical material. Although currently engaged in saber rattling, North Korea's cash strapped regime could be open to a nuclear deal, as the Kim family was in 1994. Perhaps the highest priority of negotiations with North Korea would be freezing its uranium enrichment program, which provides the Pyongyang regime an alternative route to nuclear weapons production. With Iran, the U.S. objective in the current negotiations is reportedly to limit uranium enrichment to the pilot site at Natanz under the International Atomic Energy Agency's close surveillance to prevent cheating. President Obama has declared, quote, "I do not have a policy of containment. I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon" close quote. By drawing this red line, preventing weaponization, the president's signaled that the United States would not launch a preventive war to deny Iran any hedge nuclear option. His disavowal of containment is a reflection of the meaning the term has taken on in the contemporary debate. That is, acquiescing to Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons and then deterring their use through the

retaliatory threat of U.S. nuclear weapons. That connotation is an unfortunate departure from George Kennan's concept of containment, which was keeping regimes in check until they collapsed of their own internal weakness.

The Obama administration has offered the outliers a stark choice: integration or isolation. And therein lies the dilemma. North Korea and Iran perceive the very process of integration into an international community who's dominant power is the United States, as an insidious threat to regime survival. Integration offers economic benefits to sustain the regime but it also carries the risk of political contagion that could destabilize it. With that, this unresolved dilemma -- excuse me, what this unresolved dilemma means, is critical to our understanding of the North Korean and Iranian challenges. And that is this: The nuclear issue is a proxy for the more fundamental foreign policy debate within the outlier regimes over what types of relationship they are prepared to have with the United States and the rest of the world. That strategic choice turns on persisting questions in each country. In Tehran, whether the Islamic republic is a revolutionary state or an ordinary country. In Pyongyang, whether the regime can survive without the small nuclear arsenal that provides both a military deterrent and a perennial bargaining chip to extract economic concessions from the outside world. For the United States and its allies, the bottom line is this. The coercive diplomacy currently being pursued by the United States and its allies toward the outliers can realistically aim only to bound, not to fully roll back, their programs.

The surrogate status of the nuclear questions, of the nuclear question with the outliers in turn presents a dilemma to Washington. The policy spectrum runs from induced integration at one end to coerced regime change at the other. Between them lies that third option of containment. The United States is essentially pursuing such a strategy toward North Korea now. With Iran, an updated version of Kennan's strategy would decouple the nuclear question from the issue of regime change and rely on internal forces as the agent of society change. Living with nuclear outliers is the best of a bad set of options and will require a robust strategy of containment in form, if not in name. Thank you.

[applause]

Steve Inskeep:

Thank you Mr. Litwak. Very thoughtful, careful, reasoned views that you've offered there. We're going to dispense with all those things now and dig into this, and to have a discussion. Congratulations on the book. I've enjoyed reading it and I've learned a lot from it and I think that there's a lot to go over here, beginning with a couple of things that you alluded to that I want to follow up on. First, you mentioned U.S. intelligence estimates that Iran has yet to decide formally to pursue a nuclear weapon. Whatever steps they've taken, they have not decided to get the bomb, according to U.S. intelligence. Mr. Friedman has written that you believe they are seeking a nuclear weapon. So let's start with the evidence, what evidence is there that Iran is pursuing once course or the other?

Robert Litwak:

I would distinguish, I mean on this issue of proliferation intentions, we're talking about a continuum of developing capabilities, but I would look at motivations. And I would distinguish between two different categories of state. States that perceive that they face an existential threat, North Korea, Pakistan, Israel, for whom nuclear weapons, they need a crash program to get a weapon and they provide an answer to their security dilemma. By contrast, there are states that pursue nuclear weapons for status or other regional reasons. I mean, think of India's program, it wasn't facing an existential crisis. And I think the Iranian program fits much more into sort of the India template than to North Korea, Pakistan or India.

Steve Inskeep:

You think they'd like a weapon but they don't necessarily feel they must have one.

Robert Litwak:

I think, as I indicated in my comments, they want the option, breakout capability, a hedge. But the leadership, according to what I read, to people I talk to, like Mark Mazzetti sitting in the back, has not made a strategic decision to acquire nuclear -- of the New York Times -- to acquire nuclear weapon. What we know historically about this program, which of course, began prior to the current Islamic republic regime under the shah, is that it's determined, it's incremental, but it's not a crash program

to get a nuclear weapon as quickly as possible in the face of an existential threat.

Steve Inskeep:

Mr. Friedman, how do you see it?

Thomas Friedman:

Yeah, I think Rob's analysis is right. I think they want to be one screwdriver away from having a nuclear weapon, but always maintain plausible deniability that they don't have it, so you don't invite easy attack. For them, I think, I think this is a crash program to get one screwdriver away though. You know what I mean, that, if one looks at their behavior, and for them, I think it, it really began as Bush insurance. I think the crash really began as insurance against, in the wake of the Iraq war. , an initiative based on regime change, where the United States would actually -- they had to worry -- take out the Iranian regime. We know from the intelligence that their program came to a grinding halt, a very visible hah, we're stopped, we stopped, see we stopped. We put the screwdrivers down, right after the Iraq war began. So, there was a moment there where they definitely perceived a threat and took visible action to slow down the program.

Steve Inskeep:

Why do you think that they don't feel, that Iranian regime does not feel that they must have a nuclear weapon in order to survive?

Robert Litwak:

I think as Tom alluded to, in the -- in the middle of the last decade, when the United States had taken down adjacent regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq and had, you know, significant military capabilities in the region to the extent they felt an existential threat it may well have derived from the U.S. military presence in the region. And indeed in the Bush administration with this mixed message of regime change or conduct change, there were administration voices saying that the lesson of Iraq for Iran was take a number. That type of regime change, you know, rhetoric that could well have been a motivator for them to move forward on the program, as Tom mentioned, to have this hedge capability to be as close of it as possible. And that's really where we're at now.

You know uranium enrichment provides an inherent hedge. As the former head of the IEA, ElBaradei said, "you can't bomb knowledge." They have acquired the capability to do it, but it's a continuum with weaponization and mating the weapons with ballistic missiles at the other end of the continuum. Really the debate now is how can we keep them as far down the continuum as possible?

Steve Inskeep:

You also used the phrase containment and you use it in your book.

Robert Litwak:

[affirmative]

Steve Inskeep:

You talk about containment 2.0, in fact as a subhead of one of the chapters. And you alluded in your remarks to George F. Kennan; everyone in this room, I'm sure, will know him as the father of the containment policy against the Soviet Union. And you seem to be suggesting a similar approach here. And let's talk specifically about Iran, although I know you apply it to other countries as well. What would containment look like? I mean is the beginning essentially saying, "We don't care how far Iran gets along that continuum, how many screwdrivers away? Our policy is the same regardless. And our policy is the same even if they get the bomb," is that the beginning point?

Robert Litwak:

Well, you know the immediate point in response is that the purpose of coercive diplomacy, the sanctions that brought Iran back to the table, is to reach an accord that would keep Iran technologically as far down the continuum away from this last screwdriver turned the --

Steve Inskeep:

So you don't stop trying in that area?

Robert Litwak:

Absolutely, I mean, you know critical element of containment is sanctions. As someone once said of the North Koreans, the North Koreans don't respond to pressure, but without pressure, they don't respond. And the same can be said of the Iranians. And if we don't get the outcome that we are seeking in the current round of negotiations with Moscow, then the leaders of the parties involved in

the multilateral negotiations, at least the Europeans and the Americans, have indicated they're going to throttle up the sanctions to increase the pressure for noncompliance.

But containment, to the extent that there's a takeaway, you know from the book, I'm trying to conduct; you know a form of policy hygiene and to try to rehabilitate the term containment and to unpack it. The connotation, as I said, has essentially taken on the notion that we would acquiesce to Iran, acquiring the weapons and then deter theirs with ours. Really the containment is a much broader strategy that checks the power, but then allows the internal forces within this society, what Kennan in his seminal article refers to as the internal contradictions of that society to play out and overtime lead to kind of regime evolution, that is sort of regime change over an extended period of time, be a different type of regime.

Steve Inskeep:

Is containment the policy the Obama administration is following now, even though the President will not call it that?

Robert Litwak:

Well, I think the president was in a very difficult situation because he had to thread the needle politically. The critical meeting, of course was when the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was here. And when one looks at this technological continuum, the issue is at what point are you prepared to act militarily and what level of risk are you prepared to run? And there was this classic kind of political dance between the president and the Israeli prime minister where the Israeli prime minister was pushing for a U.S. commitment to act as far down the continuum away from a weapon as possible. Really, the notion of denying Iran this hedge option, which I think is probably not realistic given where they're at in terms of the program. And the president set the redline, said we would act, but it would be to prevent Iran from acquiring a weapon. And that was a clear signal that the U.S. evaluation is that military action, if it were ever to come, would be at the very end of the technological -- you know at the end of that technological acquisition process.

Steve Inskeep:

So it's a question of exactly when you would strike. Thomas Friedman you wrote, I believe it's in March, when

President Obama gave an interview to Jeffrey Goldberg at the Atlantic, a long interview on the subject of Iran and the question of whether Israel should strike Iran, whether the United States should support Israel in striking Iran. And you summarize the President as, quote, "making clear that allowing Iran to develop nuclear weapons and then containing it was not a viable option." What makes it a not viable option to try a policy of containment?

Thomas Friedman:

Well I was describing what I thought was their --

Steve Inskeep:

Of course, yes.

Thomas Friedman:

-- their policy. Let me back up and just tell you how I see the situation -

Steve Inskeep:

Please.

Thomas Friedman:

-- generally and not try to react to just one line of the column. Not every problem has a solution and I think this is one of them. Because the fact is I think that for Iran hostility to the West is strategic for the Iranian regime. It is strategic. A degree of isolation and hostility with the West is fundamental for their ability to both rule and rule in a way that requires a good deal of sacrifice for the Iranian people. So if you start there, and then you back up and to pick up Rob's point, well what the administration is basically saying; the difference between the administration and Israel is that the administration understands that for a deal to happen with Iran, down the road as part of this deal, if Iran lives up to certain guidelines, Iran would be entitled to a civilian nuclear program. It would be entitled to enrich. That is the American policy, they don't ever say that, but that's basically in the back of their mind. They know to have a deal with this regime, that Iran has to be allowed to have a civilian nuclear program under international inspection.

The Israeli program's position, as Rob said, is that anything that allows Iran enrichment capability in effect gives them breakout capability in effect is something that we oppose. So you have actually a strategic, you know,

split but it hasn't come out yet between the West, I would say, and Israel. The Iranian policy, I believe, is to see if they can enter that sweet spot where they basically split Israel off from the West. To do that though, they've got to come forward to some degree, they've got to engage, you know with the West. They've got to change behavior. And I think these are hard men. You know it's not clear to me; it's never been clear to me how decisions are made there. Whether regime actually could make a decision that big, I think that's another question, another reason this might not have a solution.

And so I think, therefore by default, we face a choice. Are we really going to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities, short of them weaponizing? Or are we going to basically sit back and contain this to the degree we can? Now, I grew up in Minnesota and in Minnesota we had a great State Fair every summer. And when I was a young boy at that state fair, there were a man who could guess your weight. And I was absolutely -- as a young boy, I was, "how did he guess people's weight?" And if he got it wrong within a few pounds, you won a cupie doll. How did he guess your weight? The Middle East people can guess your power down to the last gram, okay. And Iran and this regime in particular, is particularly adept at that. And they're reading the international scene right now. They're seeing Europe in turmoil. The American economy, you know, in a very fragile state. And they've taken our measure. And they've said, "These guys are going to risk destabilizing the entire global economy to take out our potential breakout capability, I don't think so." And that's why I think these talks now have ground to a halt and their attitude is -- they're going to drive a really hard bargain. They know there's no way the Europeans will support that. They think it's not possible with America and so they are going to drive a very, very hard bargain.

Steve Inskeep:

I wonder if you've alluded to another reason that it's hard to make a deal. You suggested that opposition to the -- America, opposition to the West is a big part of the Iranian regime's power calculus. Do you think that regime is in a situation where they have to acknowledge, or they have to conclude from their vantage point that any agreement with the United States could actually be perilous to them no matter how favorable the terms?

Thomas Friedman:

You know Rob has alluded to this in this book and his previous ones and it gets to the Cuba policy, you know. So we've had a policy of isolating Castro now for six decades is it? How long? As a lab test I'd say the results are in.

[laughter]

You know what I mean? And the results are that Castro has been nourished by and empowered by this isolation. I think what is the biggest threat to the Iranian regime is a U.S. Embassy back in Tehran and a state of sort of stable, decent relations between the two countries. And this gets back to where I started where it started. Some problems just don't have a solution.

Steve Inskeep:

And so it's a matter of dragging it out, it's a matter of trying not to get to a crisis point.

Thomas Friedman:

And hope that something, another Green Revolution comes along and hopefully the rise of our natural gas bounty in this country and the prospect of global oil prices declining to a point that on top of sanctions, you know, could really break the will of this regime. Unlikely, but I think that's possible. The other thing I think you have to remember is this, just toss out one other point. If I were back in graduate school now, and I were writing a PhD thesis on Middle East studies, where I was, my PhD thesis would be called, "Iraq 1991 to 2003." That is between the end of Gulf War one and the beginning of Gulf War two because during those 12 years, U.N. sanctions pulverized Iraqi society. Pulverized and basically in many ways crushed the Iraqi society. We need to step back -- again this is part of the impossibility and difficulty of the -- that's why, you know people, Ahmed Chalabi was running around telling Dick Cheney about the Iraq of the 1950s. That was not the Iraq we found. We found a broken society where no one was throwing flowers, in fact they were scrambling, you know for something to eat. We were dealing with a society where people's calorie count, you know, was literally affected by that.

We need to be very careful, you know, that if this thing drags on, this is not an argument for not doing, it's an

argument for why this is such an impossible problem that you end up with Iran that 10 - 15 years is a pulverized society. And where that could go is, I think is something that we also need to reflect upon.

Steve Inskeep:

You write in the book, Mr. Litwak, that societal change is likely to come from within, if it comes at all. But that's got to be a frustrating thing for an American policymaker to accept because it's suggesting that we collectively, that the United States can't really do anything.

Robert Litwak:

Well the nuclear and societal change timelines are not in sync and that's, you know, a real dilemma for U.S. policymakers. The point, you know that Tom alluded to and which I highlighted in my remarks, and it's a major theme of this book is that the nuclear issue is this surrogate or proxy issue for this broader debate about what type of relationship the Tehran regime is prepared to have with the outside world. I'm fortunate to work at the Wilson Center, where we have the best Iran program in town with Haleh Esfandiari directing it. So I get the input of all this wonderful regional and country expertise and that is clearly the case.

As long as that question is unresolved, and a question, you know this possibility -- I kind of as a thought experiment thought of the same thing. You know President Obama came in like FDR with the Soviet Union. What if day one he said mutual embassies, no preconditions? It would've created an enormous dilemma for the Iranian regime how to respond because of the centrality of kind of anti-Westernism and sort of hostility to the United States in their body politic. And it defines their politics in a way that Iran does not define American politics. But the supreme leader has said that Iran, you know there's this famous discussion that there's this fatwa against nuclear weapons. Hillary Clinton, the secretary of state has picked them up [unintelligible], that's what you assert; let's operationalize that through these negotiations.

So I think there is political space there to craft a deal, which like the 1994 agreed framework with North Korea, would bound the program to bide time. Having consumed the country's specific literature on Iran and given historical hostility to what the historians would call external agency

in bringing about change in societies because the heart of the system, Tom just wrote about it last week, is hardwired around the concept of sovereignty. And so anytime you try to externally change regimes, it violates this cardinal norm. That leaves you with internal agents of change, which are organic and arguably more durable. So it's sort of a question of these competing timelines which are not in sync. And Tom said there are some problems that don't have solutions. I'm reminded of the quip of, I think, General Brent Scowcroft that says, "Problems have solutions, dilemmas have horns." And that's what we're doing right here.

[laughter]

Steve Inskeep:

I want to ask a couple more questions about Iran, and ask a little bit about other countries. And in a few minutes we are going to be inviting your questions from the audience here. And it's my understanding that people who are in the overflow rooms also will have an opportunity to ask questions and some of them may be handed up to me here. And so we'll try to involve everybody in the discussion. But let me ask something about timelines. You have both suggested that this is long-term problem. You can't solve it tomorrow. There has been a lot of rhetoric in the United States, particularly in the presidential campaign but not solely, arguing that every time we try to be patient, every time we deal with sanctions rather than military action, every time we negotiate with Iran, that we collectively are just giving them more time to build a weapon, that the Iranians are just playing us for time. What would you say to people who make that argument?

Robert Litwak:

I began working on the issue of rogue states when I was on the National Security Council staff on leave from the Wilson Center. The term came into the political lexicon. And I came back to the Wilson Center and tried to write a book appropriate for the Wilson Center like, where did this term come from? How did it get translated into policy and saw the liabilities of that approach. I think that on the issue of kind of the military action, you know, there's the liabilities that I referred to. The Iranian leadership has said that a limited attack on Iran would be perceived as the initiation of a war. And that even an Israeli attack would be viewed synonymously as an American attack and we'd

be implicated. And I think when I worked on the National Security Council and when you're preparing a decision memo to the President of United States and you're doing pros and cons, con: could trigger major regional conflict is a nontrivial con --

[laughter]

-- for the president of the United States. And so that sort of colors it. And moreover since -- and this gets to the sort of regime change paradox which is, the reason we would even consider military action is because of the character of the regime and yet military action would at best delay the program and could bolster the regime. So the crux, the core of what we view as the problem would not really be addressed by that. In a sense you could make the argument it's a thought experiment, I'm not advocating, that if we were to launch a military strike, it really should be go for the full Monty. You know if the problem is the regime, but then you have all the liabilities that Tom mentioned. The impact on the oil markets and there's a phrase someone used, "the fallacy of the last move." The notion that we get the last move, if we bomb; which by the way, would not be a one night affair as one analyst put it. We're talking major campaign that would go over days. Think of Operation Desert Fox in the December 1998, days and would have the kind of the downside there. So it's really -- that's why I've tried through this book, you know, first to talk about the proxy status and nuclear questions in terms of these broader debates within these societies. And secondly to try to rehabilitate the term containment because what -- I'm a card-carrying utilitarian. And as a citizen --

Steve Inskeep:

Do you get a card for that?

[laughter]

Robert Litwak:

Yeah, they give them out in Concord, Massachusetts.

[laughter]

And the box that drives me crazy is where we can't bomb and we won't negotiate, we end up in this third box of acquiescing the bad stuff happening. And I think that's

what we want to avoid and that's why I've tried modestly in this book to rehabilitate containment. Because we may well end up -- while we're in this netherworld between hedge and weapon, that's essentially the policy we're going to be pursuing toward these states, in form if not in name.

Steve Inskeep:

Tom Friedman, are the Iranians playing us for time?

Tom Friedman:

Oh, sure. I mean I think they have been from the very beginning. And you know I go back, I'm 58 so I'm of that generation that practiced nuclear bomb tests, you know in elementary school going down to the basement. The world is full of uncertainties and we're going to have to live with some. And I think of all the options I see, the one Rob concludes in his book is certainly to me the least worst option, which is containing Iran and hoping that -- doing everything to slow down the program --

Robert Litwak:

Absolutely.

Tom Friedman:

-- prevent it from coming in. But if it does come in to containing Iran, and I don't think we should be driven by Bibi Netanyahu's assessment or his schedule. I don't buy the crazy man theory that Iran gets a bomb and the next morning say, "Now, let's take out Tel Aviv," knowing full well they'll be vaporized, you know the next day. I think where Israelis have a very legitimate concern though, and it's one I take very seriously, is actually what happens if we do contain them and the regime does start to collapse? And who controls those weapons? What does a collapsing regime do at the time? I've had some very legitimate concern. But we dealt with that concern of loose noose with the Soviet Union when they were aimed at us. So the world is full of uncertainties and this is to me about taking -- living with the least amount of uncertainty, with the least dangerous policy.

And again all of this is happening. We can never forget against a backdrop of potential global contagion of our financial systems where anything you do could trigger a whole set of actions at a time when the world is not just interconnected, but is now interdependent. And there's been a qualitative change of integration from

interconnected to interdependent. And when that happens what anybody does, whether Greeks don't pay their taxes, or Israelis bombed Tehran, starts to affect us all.

Steve Inskeep:

Well given what you've just said, and I feel you've alluded to the answer, but let me just put it boldly. Suppose the Iranians cross that line that the President has drawn. The U.S. learns credibly that they're about to turn the last screw, it's going to happen tomorrow. The last screw's going to be turned tomorrow, or it was turned this morning. And then the question is, do you attack at that moment or do you continue trying to contain? What's the choice? What's the best choice available?

Robert Litwak:

There's no best choice, I mean and that is President Clinton was sort of at that point in the spring of 1994 on the North Korean nuclear program. And there have been, you know Bob Gallucci has written about that episode with Dan Poneman, and they don't know what the president would've done about whether they would bomb the North Korean facility or not. If you look at the range of views, look at the current issue of Foreign Affairs with the article by Kenneth Waltz, who basically says, "Look, they've got a return address, they're deterrable, we should just relax about the nuclear program," at one end of the continuum; and at the other the regime -- because the character of the regime, even a hedge is unacceptable. If you get to the point where, you know basically it's like we need to launch a preventative war, not a preemptive war because it's not an imminent threat by Iran, it's preventive war to block them from acquiring a weapon. That is a kind of really hard call because of all the known downsides. It's sort of, kind of, known downsides with some possible upsides. But I have my own view on that, but I don't know how a President would react. Right now that's the redline, preventing weaponization. And I imagine the talking point at the White House is that the White House would be prepared to act, the United States would be prepared if they did weaponize.

Steve Inskeep:

You said you have your own view.

Robert Litwak:

Yeah.

Steve Inskeep:

You're the star, you're on stage.

[laughter]

Robert Litwak:

Okay. I, you know. Look, I wrote a book -- book on détente and I've written sort of about engaging rogue states. So I think I'm viewed out in the policy community as probably, you know not a hardliner. I mean if it's basically, let's launch a preventive war against Iran, and let's be clear, I mean. You know whether you're for or against military action, an attack on Iran essentially means the initiation of a war against Iran. And you can't discount that possibility. Given that -- look, we thought about military action against China in the early '60s, Stalin acquired nuclear weapons in 1949 and he was, as my English doctoral dissertation supervisor put it, he killed 20 million people just to collectivize agriculture. You know, we deterred those powers. So it's a contentious issue, and right now American position is to act, but if a thought experiment, our president of the United States if presented with that decision memo, now's the time for preventive war, I wouldn't go there.

Steve Inskeep:

Mr. Friedman, is there a point at which you would say, the war is worth it or the war is essential?

Thomas Friedman:

Yeah, I just don't know. I mean it's just too hypothetical. It'd all depend on the context. But, you know I just go back to something I've certainly learned the hard way --

Robert Litwak:

I should have dodged it that way.

Thomas Friedman:

Yeah.

[laughter]

Born at night, not last night.

[laughter]

You know we took out Osama bin Laden in -- with our specials forces. We sent two helicopters there, one of them crashed and broke. Let's remember that. We talk about these options as if it's a given the option will succeed. Okay. And so the question whether we choose to do it? If there's one lesson that I learned from the Iraq war, it's the people who lost that war, didn't have a clue about what they were doing. And let's have some humility just about the actual technical involvement of doing these things and what can go wrong. We sent two helicopters, one crashed and thank God we had people on the ground who were ready and capable of responding. Now think about launching an air war over Iran to take out its nuclear facilities spread out over a dozen different sites.

Robert Litwak:

Can I have one point of that? Not only the unintended consequences in terms of Iranian domestic politics and the notion that we kind of understand the dynamics there, you know, it's an opaque society. It's hard for us from the outside to sort of really understand it, but let's talk about bandwidth and what has attention in Washington. You know right now Pakistan is about to lap Britain to become the fifth nuclear weapon state. They are punching out nuclear weapons faster than any other country. It is where -- you know talk about the nexus of proliferation and terrorism. And if you took a poll of proliferation specialists and said horrific scenario thought experiment we hope it remains, a nuclear weapon goes off on American soil; question, country of origin? The handicapping would be Russia, Pakistan at the top, North Korea third, Iran a fourth. And the reason is that leakage of weapons from arsenals is more likely than deliberate transfer from one to another. And what's striking to me -- again, card-carrying utilitarian is how much attention there is on Iran and how little --. We have an excellent Pakistan program through my colleague Bob Hathaway, which is a corrective to the -- how little attention there is on some of these questions regarding Pakistan where you had bodyguards assassinate the governor of Punjab and there's all -- the reports and some anecdotal about the issue of custodial control of the Pakistan nuclear arsenal. So I'm, you know, in our new agenda, Jane Harman we're going to be focusing increased attention on Pakistan.

Thomas Friedman:

I'd add one other thing that if I were the Israeli decision maker now, I think the idea of Israel undertaking a military strike on Iran in the absence of any initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian front, would be a political risk of the highest order because there are no firewalls around Israel anymore. Hosni Mubarak was a huge firewall. He absorbed the Israeli war with Hezbollah. The Israeli war in Gaza, he was a huge firewall he absorbed all of that. Without that firewall, any instability, you know, from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be transmitted directly to the Arab street. There will be no firewall. And you can say well, you know the Arabs don't care, it's Iran, its Shiites, Sunnis, and Persians. Tell me how that works out for you the morning after, you know I'd be very careful. So I were Israel and I wanted to do this, I'd at least be laying some predicates, you know. And by at least creating the most hospitable diplomatic environment I possibly could.

Steve Inskeep:

I do want to leave some time for questions, so I'm going to go directly to them now. I believe, is there a microphone in the room that's going to be going around? Okay. Madam, you're closest to the microphone so you get to go first. Please, let me just ask a couple of things of people who ask questions. If you say your name, so we know you are and get to know you a little bit. And if you can ask a short, direct question to the panelists so we have time to get in several of you, please proceed.

Barbara Slavin:

I'm Barbara Slavin with the Atlantic Council and elmonitor.com, Rob, congratulations on your new book.

Robert Litwak:

Thank you.

Barbara Slavin:

Containment with the Soviet Union meant summit meetings between leaders, student exchanges, trade, all kinds of contacts which we do not have with Iran. Can containment work when you have such an asymmetry of power and a situation that's quite dissimilar to what we had with the old Soviet Union? Thank you.

Robert Litwak:

The issue of kind of what type of relationship we have with Iran is a contentious one. And my view has been that governments should talk to governments and that peoples should be allowed to interact with other peoples. And you know this is a -- that civil societies should be allowed to interact. I thought it was problematic when the Bush administration started to fund some NGOs that were operating because it sort of blurred these lines. Haleh Esfandiari has written about this. And this feeds back to a point that Tom made how little we really know about each other. This is the longest estranged relationship, I guess next to Cuba and North Korea where we've not had any contact, and where the Iranian leaders are looking at us through the prism of their view, under the legacy of Khomeini, the Islamic Republic dealing with the inherent contradiction there. And Americans, I saw some poll that America -- this country that was the least popular for American students to be a pen pal with, these are kids, is Iran. I mean sort of the notion that just the estrangement of these societies. So you're correct. There was an imperative for dialogue with Soviet Union because they were a global superpower and had the capability of ending our existence as a society in 30 minutes. And with Iran, there's been -- there's not been that imperative, and the estrangement has been prolonged. So, there's enormous impediment there. The dynamic that was interesting is similar, in that just as the Soviet regime was focused on regime survival, you know, the Iranians, from what I can glean, are similarly, you know, monofocused on how their relationship with the outside world relates to the regime stability. And in certain ways, the issue of talking to the United States is even a more loaded question in Tehran than it ever was in Moscow.

Steve Inskeep:

You want to add something? Okay. Let's continue going around -- sir, right here in the middle there, with the striped shirt -- the blue striped shirt.

Ahmed Fer:

My name is Ahmed Fer [spelled phonetically] --

Steve Inskeep:

Please stand up so we can see you, and thank you for dressing casually so that Mr. Friedman [spelled phonetically] doesn't feel left out.

[laughter]

Thomas Friedman:

I didn't get the memo.

[laughter]

Ahmed Fer:

It's become virtually axiomatic that the fall of Bashar al-Assad will be a strategic defeat for Iran. I was curious if the negotiations, if Bashar was to fall probably in a couple months or so, would Iran perceive that, and upper leadership, as, you know, hey, we got to -- we lost a defeat, so now we got to really start to negotiate better, or if Bashar remains propped up, would Iran feel superior and -- with Hezbollah, and be -- feel superior and use that as a tool in the negotiations?

Thomas Friedman:

It's a good question. Obviously, I don't have any idea, I'd only be speculating. There's no question that if Syria were flipped from a essentially Alawite/Shiite-led country by a minority to a majority led Sunni country, it would -- it would be a strategic defeat for Iran. It would lose its land bridge to Lebanon and to Hezbollah. And that's certainly one argument that people are making for giving arms to Syrian rebels. So, you know, it -- I can't disentangle that question from the whole question of the Arab Spring. And Dan Brumberg, from Georgetown, said something to me just yesterday that I thought was very, very smart, about the Arab Spring. And that's that the Arab Spring came about because the people lost their fear of the regimes. And it's failing because they haven't lost their fear of each other. That's a really profound thought, to me. That is, Shiites are still more afraid of Sunnis than ever, and in Iraq, Sunnis are more afraid of Alawites in Syria. And they're all afraid of each other in Lebanon. Christians are afraid of -- cops are afraid of fundamentalists, fundamentalists are afraid of secular people. Because these regimes were all protection rackets. That was their gig. I'll protect you from him, and him from her, and my minority from the majority, my majority from the minority. And now that the Mafioso, the protectors, are gone, and we hailed that.

It was a great thing -- it felt like a -- something truly liberating. But it turns out that the people are now more

afraid of each other than they were of the regimes. And as a result, to me, like, it just doesn't matter. Because if you don't have citizens, if you're not a people who view one another as citizens, not as tribes, ethnicities, religious groups, fundamentalists, seculars, then you can't have a state. And so it all just then becomes a big game of risk, or diplomacy. Iran's up, Syria's down, they won, you know, Lebanon, we lost Iraq. But, at the end of the day, it's just a huge board game, that does nothing to advance the lives of the people, and really give them the freedom and the ability that they want, which is to realize their full potential as human beings.

So, I'm kind of out of the geopolitical business now. I mean, whatever happens going to happen. I don't have a vote in it. Can't determine it. It's why I've been spending all of my time, if you're reading my column, interviewing high school teachers and students and educators. Because -- trying to focus on things maybe the United States can actually control, which is, maybe, helping people get the tools to succeed in the modern world. Let them figure it out afterward.

Male Speaker:

Let me come back to the board game for a second here, Mr. Litwak if I can. Because if I were you, to summarize your question, it might be this way. Would an aggressive policy against the Syrian regime, possibly including intervention of some kind, actually be part of a containment strategy against Iran? Does one really affect the other?

Robert Litwak:

Well, interesting historical footnote. In the 1990s, Syria was not designated a rogue state, even though it met the criteria. It was, state sponsors terrorism, and chemical weapons. Because of its importance to the Arab-Israeli peace process, they didn't want to go there. And that sort of underscored the selectivity of the policy. I think now, kind of a -- an interesting sort of policy debate -- and I don't know how it's being played out -- is this Syria versus Iran. The question is, if Iran -- if the negotiations are not going anywhere and the best you can hope for is sort of the status quo, the game changer -- this is almost what -- because I'm not a regional expert, but it's sort of what, in the nuclear era, they used to call it the clever briefer argument.

That someone could go in to the president, say, you know, let's really go after Syria. Because if we're able to change the regime there, than the geopolitics of the region change. And let's put the emphasis on that, even with all the costs that it would pertain, vis-a-vis Russia and China. I mean, I could see that as an issue in the next administration, where someone would say, what are the moves on the chessboard that we could do? And really, the question -- and I say this as someone who's not a Syria expert, but analytically, you could make the case of doing something on Iran to sort of end this Lebanon-Syria, kind of, Iran axis.

Steve Inskip:

Let me ask you another question. It's from one of the overflow rooms. It's -- I'm going to mangle the name, but I believe it's Buase Atsili [spelled phonetically], American University, maybe someone knows him and knows if I got it right. What do you think about the unspoken option to work for agreement on a nuclear-free Middle East? It may sound naive -- this question goes on -- but it's not. It can give the Iranian regime a real achievement and retain for Israel its conventional edge. Just there at the end you realize what that's suggesting: suggesting that, as part of some broad agreement, you try to get Israel to give up nuclear weapons.

Robert Litwak:

Well, it's an undeclared nuclear weapons state. And there's a debate in Israel about whether they should go overt or not. I was struck by the news mention of the Dolphin class submarines being -- that Germany's provided, basically saying, I mean, those tubes -- those missile tubes are there for a purpose. And they're going to be getting their fifth, and they were on station off the coast of Oman and elsewhere. It's a clear signal to the Iranians, and it's interesting whether Israel will want to be -- in this new era, go more overt or not. I think as long as there's a perception of an existential threat, a nuclear weapon-free zone is not possible. We had an Israeli scholar here. And even though I'm against, you know, basically I just see the downside of the military option. Every time I meet with Iranians, and I did so recently in a meeting overseas, you know, I will tell them directly, you are pushing every button of the Israelis. Holocaust denial, the radical activism and rhetoric -- as one of our Israeli scholars here put it, Iran can say,

"Death to Israel," or it can have an atomic bomb. But it can't say, "Death to Israel," and have an atomic bomb. And so, I think the nuclear weapon-free zone is really just not in the cards.

But one further thought -- because the book gets into sort of proliferation dynamics. North Korea detonated -- and we didn't see a wave of proliferation in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan. And if Iran were to become a nuclear weapon state, I think there've been predictions in the past of a world of 35-50 nuclear weapon states. We're not in that world because most countries don't see that nuclear weapons serve a concrete -- they're expensive, and they serve a concrete security interest. If Iran were to become a nuclear weapon state, probably the one state that would rethink its nuclear intentions clearly would be Saudi Arabia. And they'd be more likely -- their country, their habit, as someone put it, they add a zero to the check if they have a problem. And they would try to outsource it to Pakistan and have a deployment there or something like that rather than create their own. But I don't see a nuclear weapon-free state as a -- in the cards at all.

Steve Inskeep:

Let me invite a final question from this side of the room. Sir with the beard there, go right ahead.

Mark Katz:

Thank you very much, Mark Katz [spelled phonetically]. Congratulations Rob, on the new book. My question is, what if the Israeli or U.S. governments don't take your good advice, and a military strike is launched, which does not destroy the regime? What happens to the international sanctions regime after that, that the U.S. has been leading? Does that fall apart, or, you know, obviously a lot of animosity will be built up. A lot of criticism of either the U.S. or Israel. Does, in fact, Iran win that game in which there's a military strike because, in other words, you know, dividing its opposition? Thank you.

Robert Litwak:

I think, you know, to be telegraphic with short time, that would be the least of our problems. You know, of the future of the international sanctions regime after an attack on Iran, because of all the, kind of, known and unintended consequences of military action. I'd just say one additional point about the book, if possible. My focus

here is on nuclear proliferation and nuclear outliers, these are the countries I've worked on. But the optic is a broader one. And really, the fishing license of the book is really the centerpiece, the bulls-eye of what the mission of the Wilson Center is, which is to look at basic, how ideas affect action. I'm not a fetishist about words, rogue or outlier, it's really how the words drive policies that have consequences. And I've tried to elucidate what they are. I have my views -- you can't detach yourself from it. But basically it's an analytical framework, and what I -- have a chapter in there that deals with strategy development.

The approach could be applied to a broader set of states than the nuclear outliers. Jane Harman, who just was in Burma where the junta's taken kind of a strategic decision to open up to the outside world, and you can see the dynamic from outside, see the dynamic of how the combination of pressure and inducement has led that regime to throw the dice, and to, kind of, roll the dice and to make a strategic decision to open up to the outside world. And I think that's really kind of where we need to focus to better understand the regimes that are ruling these countries, and get a sense of what are the sources of leverage, what's an inducement, what are their motivations. Recognizing how difficult a proposition that is, particularly in states where decision making is opaque.

Thomas Friedman:

Yeah, just to say one thing about that question, it's a very important question, but, first of all, I want to thank Rob for letting me be on this panel today. I think I've been, one way or another, either got to write a column about it, or be part of the whole trilogy, and I think it's -- what Rob's done is a real contribution. What he said, the very language about how we talk about things, and, because, to name something is to own it. And I think it's really vital. So I'm really glad to be here and thanks for having me. So I was at the Wales Hay-on-Wye book festival last week, and -- great book festival, Wales, I was there -
-

[simultaneous talking]

-- my own book, you know, another rogue state, you know. And -- but they said, "We're having an Iran panel. After you talk about your book, would you stick around and would

you be on the Iran panel? Moderated by Nick Gallon from the BBC." And I had nowhere to go, so I thought I might learn something, smart people on the panel, so I agreed to do it. And it was in a tent out there in Wales. About 200 people in the audience. More people than in this room, actually. It was sort of dark, couldn't see everybody. People on the panel very smart, talking in a very technical way about Iran, in a very measured way. And then we got to questions. And I think it was the second question was, "What about Israel? What about Israel? Why should we talk about Iran's bomb and not Israel's bomb?" And I would say 90 percent of the audience erupted in, "Yeah!"

[laughter]

Why are we talking about Iran? Why aren't we talking about Israel's bomb? And I thought, "Toto, you are not in Kansas."

[laughter]

Okay. So you want to know what the mood will be like in the world to maintain sanctions, okay, after an Israeli strike on Iran? Well, if that little cross sample of book buyers in Wales was any indication, good luck.

[laughter]

Steve Inskeep:
Well, on that thought, I'm glad --

[laughter]

-- I'm glad you alluded to book buyers, because what's going to happen now is I'm going to ask you all to remain here for just a moment and Mr. Litwak is going to get around and get in position to sign books if you'd like him to sign them, and there's reception outside as well. I just ask you all to remain seated, and you can spend the next moment or so as you remain seated thanking our panelists for an excellent discussion. Thank you very much.

[applause]

And congratulations on the book.

[end of transcript]