

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

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 Inskip 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 pgioArtil.hl bey roagesof ahe rDMZ Ihe nTj T* (shalncsof aissal cultion >iswigh atd S pcommttendto aexpnd ig End Senrichng tdebtes n >som af ahe rTj 0 -1.13 TT

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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

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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 undeter ble non giovirtuhington hptMCgnsedsequer

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

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.

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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?

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 Inskip:

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 --

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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

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 Inskip:

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 Inskip:

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.

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 Inskeep:

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,

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 -
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[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.

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