



**Women's Foreign Policy Group
Beyond the Headlines Event
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**The Iranian Election:
What It Means for Iran and Relations with the US**

Patricia Ellis: Good evening and welcome to everyone. We're so pleased that you could all join us tonight. We have members; we have guests; we have friends, and I'd like to recognize two of our board members: Diana Negroponte and Isabel Jasinowski. I am really glad that both of you could be with us tonight.

This program took me back to my days as a journalist. As some of you know, I worked for the McNeil-Lehrer News Hour and the Canadian Broadcasting for a number of years, and I said with all these developments going on in Iran, we have got to do a "quick-and-dirty," excuse the lingo, get this together quickly because we really have to get behind the headlines and understand the implications of the elections, the protests, who the players are, what it means for Iran, what it means for the US, the region, differences with Europe, the role of women. Just so many questions, and I thought about it for a few seconds and said we have to find the best person we can find to take us behind the headlines and explain and help us explore what's really going on, and obviously this is the time when things are so complicated because of the crackdown on journalists, the expulsion of journalists, the emergence of Twitter, and kind of knowing how to assess information, getting information, and all those kinds of things, and so we're extremely lucky to have Barbara Slavin. She is a friend of the Women's Foreign Policy Group; we celebrated her when her book on Iran came out in 2007. We did programs in both New York and Washington, and now she's both writing and also the person making the decisions on what gets into the newspaper, how things are covered in her position as Assistant Managing Editor for World National Security at *The Washington Times*. I'll just give you a few more important details about her in a moment.

I just wanted to remind everybody here about a very exciting, upcoming event that the Women's Foreign Policy Group will be holding. On July 23rd, we are launching a new series called the Women in Power Series, and we're really fortunate to be able to feature the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, who is the new Administrator of the UN Development Programme, Helen Clark. She is really an amazing woman and very impressive. This is part of the series, and

the exciting thing is that there are more and more international and domestic women leaders that we will be celebrating. So we hope that as many of you as possible will be able to join us, and it's not far away, not long from now, and so we hope that you'll sign up and take advantage of early sign-up.

Now, a few more words about Barbara, and then I will turn the floor over to her. As I mentioned, she wrote a book in 2007 which was really a great book, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation*. Many of you see her regularly on PBS, C-SPAN. You hear her on NPR. Last year she joined *The Washington Times*. She previously was the Senior Diplomatic Reporter for *USA Today*. And most relevant to our discussion tonight, she has been to Iran at least seven times and was the first newspaper reporter to interview the president of Iran, the center of so much controversy right now. She wrote her first book while she was at the Wilson Center for International Scholars, and then she was a Senior Fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace, and she researched and wrote a very interesting report called *Mullahs, Money, and Militias: How Iran Exerts Its Influence in the Middle East*. Please join me in welcoming Barbara Slavin.

Barbara Slavin: Thank you very much for such a generous welcome, and I am very glad that I was able to make it here – and the traffic wasn't too bad. It's been a crazy three weeks. I don't think I've ever been so emotionally involved in a story that I was covering, organizing coverage about. It really has been a remarkable time. When I think about what happened on June 12, I am reminded of a commercial that some of you may have seen that has been on television recently. It's for a bank. There's a boy and he's playing with a very nice red truck, very pretty red truck, and all of a sudden a man comes into the room, and he takes away the red truck, and he gives the kid a piece of cardboard that is cut out in the shape of the truck. When the child complains, the man says, "Well, you should have read the fine print." And I was thinking about this in terms of the Iranian election because that was really what happened to them. It was kind of the case of bait and switch.

Normally in Iran the fraud takes place before the election. You have a body called the Guardian Council – which is made up of clerics, mostly appointed by the Supreme Leader – that narrows the field of candidates down to just a few from hundreds, sometimes even thousands. And then the election takes place relatively fairly, and, you know, people vote and they get who they choose. But in this case, I think, millions of Iranians never got to read the fine print, and they are furious about the purported results of this election. We can talk in the Q&A a little bit more about why it is so apparently bogus. There are a number of indications that the figures simply were not right. Even in the countryside, where the incumbent president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad allegedly has support, I was told by some who were there that they took the ballot boxes away from the polling stations – they didn't open them and count the votes in front of witnesses which is the normal practice in Iran. There were many things about this election that smelled. In ethnic areas that would've supported one of the other candidates, Ahmadinejad supposedly won (in ethnic Azeri parts of the country). The main opponent, Mir Hussein Moussavi, is Azeri. In the part where there is a tribe called Lurs which would favor Mehdi Karroubi, Ahmadinejad won. He didn't win in Tehran, but he won about – according to these results – almost everywhere else. And people simply have not accepted it.

People always talk about how Iran is not ready for another revolution, and I certainly bought into this. But I didn't bank on this kind of egregious overreach by the government. Iranians can take a lot, but when something is so patently unfair, they respond. And this was the proverbial straw, I think, that broke the camel's back for millions of Iranians. And of course, we've seen the results: mass demonstration on the streets of Tehran unlike any that have occurred since the 1978-79 revolution. I've been there for the rent-a-crowd demonstrations that they have and I know the difference. This was real. To see these masses in Azadi (Freedom) Square and know that they were there of their own volition, and not because they were bussed in and promised a free lunch, was really something.

I think what we've also seen is the unmasking of a system that was a sort of quasi-theocracy, quasi-democracy and now has become essentially a military dictatorship or at least a wannabe military dictatorship. I think the questions are: Will this stand and, if so, for how long, and what should the rest of the world do about it? It certainly seems as though the regime has prevailed for now: the numbers of demonstrations have been reduced; there are fewer people on the streets; there is a massive police and paramilitary presence on the streets. But I don't think it's over. We have seen a split in the Iranian political elite beyond the question of what's going on in terms of the people. We've never seen a split in the elite like this since the first few years after the Revolution when Khomeini, the leader of the Revolution, turned on the other groups that had supported the Revolution against the Shah, the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, which was sort of the Islamic leftist group, and various other groups were essentially purged in a very bloody way and were forced out of the ruling coalition. We have not seen divisions this deep since then.

Mir Hussein Moussavi, the main opposition candidate, has not accepted defeat. He insists that there should be a new election; he has not accepted this phony baloney recount that the government conducted, where they allegedly recounted 10% of the ballots in certain areas. Mehdi Karroubi, a cleric who was a reformist candidate, has not accepted the results. And yesterday a website associated with the third opposition candidate, a conservative, Mohsen Rezai, a former commander of the Revolutionary Guard, published statistics from more than 50 voting districts that showed the vote count in these areas in multiples of tens, all of them: 200 votes, 1800 votes, 400 votes. It's more than an anomaly; I think it is a statistical impossibility.

Yesterday the Guardian Council, which is this body as I mentioned that vets candidates for office, certified the results and even said that Ahmadinejad had gotten more votes in some of the areas than had previously been thought. I don't know what the Iranian word for "chutzpa" is, but what they have done is they have said, I mean, my understanding is that they basically flipped the results. Moussavi was told by an official in the Interior Ministry on the night of the election that he had won and that he had won big. He called an associate in Paris, the filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf in Paris, and told him, "I won, and they're telling me to hold off on the announcement. You'll have the celebration on Sunday." I think what happened is that the government freaked out when they saw the vote totals, they flipped the results, and they gave the landslide to Ahmadinejad and not to Moussavi. That's the only way I can understand what has happened there.

I talked about the split in the elite. There is another very important Iranian politician, a former president, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has said very little in the last two and a half weeks

about these results. He intensely dislikes Ahmadinejad. The government arrested his daughter and a couple of other family members last Sunday just as a sort of hint to him that they can indeed crack down. But he still has not come out and embraced the results. When Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the country, addressed Friday prayers last Friday, Rafsanjani was not there, so there was no show of unity. This is some deep, deep division within the elite of the Iranian government. And even conservatives – I mentioned Mohsen Rezai, who has accounted that he has not accepted the results. The Parliament Speaker, Ali Larijani has not accepted the results, and the mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, has not accepted these results. So this isn't over.

The clerics in Iran are less important than they used to be. It's still called an Islamic Republic, but it's really become, as I said, much more of a military dictatorship in recent years. Khamenei does not have the religious credentials to be Supreme Leader – he never did. And he's always been resented by the senior clerics in Qom, which is the theological center in Iran. In the last few weeks, some of the clerics, the grand ayatollahs, have come out and rejected the results also. Their voices are important, but I think less important, perhaps, than they have been in the past.

The biggest indication that the regime cheated is what it's done to the people of Iran since this election. A spokesman for Moussavi, Mr. Makhmalbaf, the filmmaker, says that 249 people have been killed on the streets of Tehran and other cities, and human rights organizations say more than two thousand people have been arrested. Among them, my correspondent in Tehran, a Greek national who was picked up on his way out of the country two weeks ago. Besides this gentleman, many, many, many Iranians. The entire reform movement, pretty much, apart from Mr. Moussavi and the former president Khatami, have been picked up. All of their advisors. All of the people I used to quote when I went to Tehran are basically sitting in Evin Prison now. Now if this regime had nothing to hide, if these elections were free and fair, why would they throw two thousand people in prison? Many of you know that I wrote a book that's quite sympathetic to Iran; I had great hopes for the country; I still do. But the behavior of this regime is not something that encourages confidence, and I think we have to be honest about that.

The crisis is not over; it is simply entering a new phase. Iranians are very proud and intelligent people, and their intelligence and pride have been insulted by this regime's behavior. Iranians put a great premium on justice; this is a very important word. Two words in Iran: justice and respect. I think there's nothing more important for Iranians. And in both senses they have been grievously offended by what the government has done.

Now, how are they reacting? Well, there are still people who are brave enough to go out on the streets and get shot at and clubbed, but they're changing their tactics. You are having smaller demonstrations now, a few hundred here and there, a few thousand, instead of a few million. They're taking other actions: they go up on the rooftops at night and yell, "Allah-u-Akbar" – "God is Great." This was a slogan from the Islamic Revolution. How could anybody in the Islamic Republic object to anyone saying God is great? But everybody knows it's anti-government, because they no longer see this as an Islamic Republic; they just see it as a military dictatorship. They are also scrawling Moussavi's name and anti-government slogans on Iranian currency over the face of Ayatollah Khamenei, which is on all the money, and they're hacking into Iranian leaders' websites with great glee. They're using Twitter; they're using Facebook;

they're using every Internet tool that they possibly can to get the word out, and I have to say that Facebook has been an incredible tool. My Iranian friends aren't posting so much, but I have Iranian-American friends who are getting information from Iran and who are posting on Facebook and are posting on Twitter. And it was on Facebook that I first saw the video of Neda Agha-Soltan dying on the streets of Tehran. I assume all of you by now have seen – if not the video, at least have seen the still pictures – of this 27 year-old woman who was simply standing on the street and was shot through the heart and died. These images are not going to go away. She is now the first martyr of what could be the second Iranian Revolution, and people will mourn her death. They will come out 40 days after her death, and they will try to demonstrate again. They will mourn the other who have been killed. This will set up a cycle of mourning like the one we saw during the Iranian Revolution. Iranians will use the religious symbolism of the regime against it.

They had a demonstration the other day; it was on the anniversary of the death of Ayatollah Baheshti who was a very important leader in the Revolution. He was killed in a bombing; I think it was Mojahedin-e-Khalq, an anti-regime group, that blew him up. And so the demonstrators came out and used the day of Ayatollah Beheshti's death to protest against the regime. They're clever; they're going to find a way.

So how does this affect all of us? How does it affect the rest of the world, in particular the United States, and what should we do? I wrote in my book that it's been a pattern in US-Iran relations that we're usually out of sync. When the Iranians are ready to negotiate with us as they were in the first term of the Bush Administration after 9-11 – after the US, with Iranian help, took out the Taliban – when they're ready, we're not. When the US is ready, they're not. Now we have an Obama Administration which campaigned on the promise of reaching out to Iran, engagement with Iran, negotiations without preconditions, but what does President Obama face? I would argue that the situation has seriously disrupted his strategy, and I think you can see that in the increasingly tough language that he has used about the crackdown in Iran.

Some Administration officials have argued, or at least they did before President Obama's press conference last Tuesday, that there was a silver lining in this somehow; that the regime in Iran had been so weakened that they would have to reach out to the United States and strike a deal on the nuclear issue just to regain their legitimacy and regain popularity. I doubt it. They have been blaming the United States and the West for the demonstrations. This is an old tactic in Iran. They use the foreigner as the scapegoat for everything that goes wrong there. I don't see how they can turn around on a dime and then reach out and negotiate with the US. And I don't see how the United States can negotiate with them. This is egregious fraud, and this is brutal behavior – this is way beyond the pale. We deal with a lot of countries that have horrible human rights records; we do it all the time. But you have a situation in Iran that is not settled; the dust has not settled. And it's going to be months, maybe years, before it settles. You're going to have a kind of underground and not even underground action against the regime that goes on from within the regime itself and on the streets of Tehran whenever people feel that there is a possibility to demonstrate. It's going to be very difficult for a president who cares about community organizing and cares about human rights – he said last week, he said that the demonstrators were on the right side of history. How can you then reach a deal over their heads with Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader? I find it very hard to believe that this is going to be possible.

I think something has snapped in Iran after thirty years. Thirty years of war, sanctions, imposed religiosity, and economic incompetence. I think that this Supreme Leader is probably the last of his breed, and that the system itself may not survive much longer, unless he agrees to compromise and allows a new election. It's still possible that may happen, although it does look increasingly unlikely day by day. He's really staked his prestige and reputation behind these so-called results. Still, if you look at the history of the Islamic Republic, it's Islamic and a republic. It's supposed to have an element of popular will and democracy in it. And what we've seen, of course, in the last few weeks has had none of that. I think there's still a possibility that members of the Revolutionary Guard Corps may split away; that the ayatollahs in Qom will suddenly get encouraged; that the members of the Assembly of Experts, which is the body that is supposed to supervise the Supreme Leader, that hasn't done so, might actually take a step.

In the meantime, and the whole example of Iran has been so fascinating, particularly in this region. Iran has always been a trailblazer in the Middle East. Its Islamic Revolution was the first of its kind. It inspired many Islamic movements. People from Osama bin Laden to people in Pakistan and others in Egypt, who really saw this – the promise of Islamic government. I remember living in Egypt in the 1980s and Muslim Brothers, and those sympathetic to them, talking about Iran and how much more democratic it was than Egypt. "They have elections," they said, "They have a choice! It's not just reaffirming the Pharaoh every 4 or 5 years like we do in Egypt." But what do people think now? There's probably a mixture of feelings. A little bit of schadenfreude because Iran has become a boogeyman for a lot of these governments now because of its nuclear program, so they're happy to see the difficulties that Iran is in, but I think there's also admiration among a lot of people who say, "My God, how brave they are. Look at how they go out in the streets."

The question of women has arisen. Iranian women have been in the forefront of these demonstrations. They have been egging their men on. And as I mentioned, their first great martyr is a woman – a 27 year-old woman. And you compare that to countries like Saudi Arabia where women can't even drive, let alone vote, or Egypt where 80% are still forced to be circumcised, quote unquote. This is something new and different. It is distressing to watch; it is upsetting to watch the crackdown that is going on now, but I think that in the long-term we can be optimistic that the Iranian people, who have been trying for democracy now since 1905, are going to get there and that this election will be a step toward that democracy when it is viewed a few years hence. And I think I'll stop there.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you very much. I'm going to open it up and call on everyone. If you could kindly identify yourself and just keep your questions or comments brief. I'd like to start off with the assessment of Obama's response. There's been criticism of him; there have been reports that there have been divisions within the Administration – Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden versus some other people in the White House. And then even not just Republican and Democrat, but many Europeans have taken a much stronger stand and felt that the United States is a country that should have taken a stronger stand. I don't know what you think. Could he have done this and still been in keeping with what he promised in terms of his approach to Iran and openness to negotiations?

Ms. Slavin: Funny you should mention divisions in the Administration, we have a front-page story tomorrow by my State Department reporter Nick Kralev that Obama was a little slow on the uptake, that Hillary was pushing for tough language before he did. He finally uttered the words “condemn” and “appalling,” which he did at his press conference. I sympathize with Obama, I think it’s a very confusing situation, particularly for people who don’t know Iran, but even for people who do. We really don’t know how this is going to come out in the end. He campaigned on a promise to engage, and his feeling was that he should, but I’m pleased to see that he’s come out with stronger language, and I think he’s also right to say that we still do want to engage; I think the onus should be on the Iranians, and the Iranians have not accepted any of his overtures – let’s be clear here. We also have a story I wrote in my paper last week that Obama sent a letter to the Supreme Leader in the first week of May proposing negotiations and asking for a reestablishment of relations, and the Supreme Leader didn’t reply. So my view is they had their chance – they didn’t jump on it. Now they’ve had a disputed election, and the US should really stand aside and just let events take their course and not be in an obscene rush to go to negotiations. As it is, the Iranians are not turning up anyway. They’ve had opportunities. They were invited to a G8 preliminary meeting in Italy last week – they didn’t go; they didn’t show. I think people, like their foreign minister, are ashamed to show their faces, frankly, after what’s happened.

Yes, there have been some divisions. I think the Administration is now on pretty much one page. We’re just going to have to wait this out and see how the Iranian regime recalibrates, if it indeed can.

Ms. Ellis: Two other questions from me and then please get ready to ask your questions. One is: you talk about some of the players. We’ve heard the names: Rafsanjani and others aside from the key opposition leaders. But are there people and could Rafsanjani play a role? Or is it just something that couldn’t happen at this time?

And I guess my other question, and one that’s been on everyone’s mind, is this whole information flow. Both assessing what’s coming in and how you cover a story like this, when there are all these crackdowns and expulsions in Iran.

Ms. Slavin: I think Rafsanjani can play a role. I think he has been severely warned because, as I’ve said, his daughter and a couple of his kids were arrested for a few hours and then let go. He’s being very, very cautious, he’s doing this really under the radar, But he’s still a man of considerable influence, particularly with the ayatollahs in Qom. And they can’t throw him in jail; he’s a former president; that they can’t do. They can’t throw President Khatami, former President Khatami, in jail. So I would say that they are crippled by the fact that many of their key people have been arrested, including many of the publishers and journalists who wrote for publications that were associated with the reform movement and with Rafsanjani. He’s not really a reformist; he’s kind of a wheeler-dealer pragmatist. But I would not count him out.

You know, a lot of people have talked about Tiananmen and comparing this with Tiananmen. China had something to offer its people after it cracked down. It had economic opportunity – it had good relations with the West that it could exploit. Iran doesn’t have that. It has rotten relations with many countries; it has no relations with the US – no economic relations. The price

of oil is certainly helpful, it's gone up a bit, but that only goes so far. So the question is really whether this regime can somehow buy off enough of the people to sort of tamp this down, and I'm not persuaded that they can, and that's where Rafsanjani comes in because of his economic power. There's also Mohsen Rezai, I've mentioned him, he was an opposition candidate, a former leader of the Revolutionary Guard Corps – this is a body of about a hundred and thirty, a hundred and fifty thousand people. Mohsen Rezai still has supporters within the Revolutionary Guard. It is possible to build on these divisions. That's why I say it's not settled yet. You have a swath of the regime that is associated with Ahmadinejad – with people that he has put into government positions and so on, who are relying on him as a meal ticket, but that's not the entire Islamic Republic. So I think there's still a potential there for a revolt in the bureaucracy, really, against him.

Now in terms of how we're covering it, it's pretty tricky these days. The reporter I sent there has been arrested; he has been in Evin Prison for two weeks. He's Greek, and the Greek Ambassador there has visited him, and the Greek government is trying to get him out. We don't know why he was jailed; we have no clue. He was just doing his job like everybody else. A lot of other Iranian journalists have been arrested as well. I have an Iranian journalist that I had used in the past, but I don't dare ask him to report for me – it would be too dangerous. I have two Iranian Americans who are monitoring all the state broadcasting and are also calling friends, and they are writing most of my stories for me now. I also have some contacts within the conservative circles of the government who have been giving me information, like the one about the letter that Obama sent to the Supreme Leader. And so I have been writing stories myself, and I've been writing analytical pieces as well, based on the information I'm getting from my own sources there. But it's very tough. And the government has been very clever about trying to kill the messenger on this. But again, I don't think they can succeed. 23 million of Iran's 70 million people are Internet users. They're very experienced at getting around government filters. We have the Twitter phenomenon; a lot of stuff has come out on Twitter. Eventually it comes out, and even the journalists who are based in Iran for these various news agencies, they're not supposed to go and cover the demonstrations. Well, so they have friends who cover the demonstrations and tell them what happened. You can't sit on this. I think ultimately it's not possible. So far whenever there's been a demonstration, we've been able to report it.

Ms. Ellis: Ok, let's open it up for questions. Could you identify yourself please? Thanks.

Lynn Holec: Hi, I'm Lynn Holec with ITR. The response to the question about Obama: I had understood, and maybe this is just a cover story, that the reason why he wasn't coming out more harshly, was that he didn't want the US to be seen as a provocateur, and that he wanted to be supportive, but not to be seen as a leader.

Ms. Slavin: That's no doubt one of the reasons, but of course we've seen the Iranians have blamed them anyway, so it doesn't really matter, frankly, what he says at this point; they're going to blame him. You remember in his speech in Cairo, he apologized—well, he acknowledged—that the United States overthrew the elected Prime Minister of Iran in 1953, which was a first. So no, he didn't want to open up the US to these kinds of charges. But I think he's seen increasingly that he had to speak out. The other thing is that this is entirely homegrown. The US had nothing to do with this; this is something the Iranians have brought on

their own heads. So I think he's really safe in speaking out and in saying that. This rebellion will succeed or fail depending on what Iranians do, it really has nothing to do with what he says or does, and the Iranian government knows that full well.

Cheryl Duckworth: Cheryl Duckworth, I'm at George Mason University. I wonder if you could speak about whatever you might know regarding the role of the diaspora, here in the US and Europe, etc. Have they been as helpful as I seem to think that they have?

Ms. Slavin: Yeah, they have played a role. You know, a lot of Iranians outside of Iran actually voted in this election, which was a first – mostly they never bothered before. But if you have an Iranian passport, which you are entitled to if you are either born in Iran or born of Iranian parents, you can have a passport – then you're entitled to vote. And I don't know what the total figure was, but the Iranians set up over, I think, a hundred polling places outside the country and you could vote at the UN Mission, you could vote here at the intersection on Wisconsin Avenue, you could vote in Los Angeles, in Canada, in Iraq, in Turkey, United Arab Emirates, a lot of places, London, I think, also. And so they were angry, too, because most of them voted for Moussavi, and their votes, they feel, were stolen. The government announced the results two hours after the polls closed. They didn't even wait for the absentee votes, let alone the votes to be properly counted in their own country. So they staged a lot of demonstrations, they've been very active in terms of passing on messages on Facebook. I have a lot of Iranian-American Facebook friends, and they've been posting videos and eye-witness accounts of demonstrations.

There hasn't been too much of a profile, there's this group, I've mentioned the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, this is a very odd group. It's on the US terrorist list, and it's kind of a cult. This is one of the groups that lost out in the power struggle after the Revolution. They did have one big rally in Paris – that's where their headquarters is – a week or so ago, but otherwise they've been pretty quiet. You've had a little involvement from monarchists. I've noticed the son of the Shah has been on with Wolf Blitzer several times, God knows why. I mean, he left Iran when he was seventeen, and nobody is looking for him to come back. So you've got some groups that are trying to exploit it to get publicity. But I think you also have ordinary Iranian-Americans, Iranian-British, Iranian-French, etc. who have been totally consumed with this story, as well they should be, they've got family back there. And they have been very involved and very helpful, and I think they will keep it alive. Some of the Iranian-American groups, I will mention in particular the National Iranian American Council, which has been a big proponent of engagement and has thoroughly and completely condemned what has happened in Iran, and I think actually gave Obama the courage to come out and use the words "I condemn," because they did it first, and so they'd given him cover to say these things. You've had a lot of solidarity among these Iranian American groups, and I think that's very important.

Diana Villiers Negroponte: The International Center for Nonviolent Conflict here in Washington played a key role in the Velvet Revolution, developing what is in effect a science on how opposition groups can bring down regimes, avoiding direct confrontation. Do you have any evidence that this kind of scientific technique is being sought within northern Tehran?

Ms. Slavin: I don't really think so. With all due respect to the democracy promotion programs and the rest, I don't think they've had really any effect on this, except that they tainted a lot of

the people who took the money when Bush was president, and a lot of those folks have wound up in jail. This is really just the genius of the Iranian people. They are inventing this as they go along. That's why it's so thrilling. Are there general principles of nonviolence that perhaps they've absorbed or learned over the years? Maybe, I don't know. I don't think they need any tutorials from the rest of us on how to do this. They are going to figure out a way. If the economy remains really troubled, the bazaar merchants will get into the action somehow, as they did in the original Revolution. People will find ways to get messages to each other. They'll have code words for things. The word will spread. As I mentioned, they will use the religious holidays and turn them around against the regime as an excuse to be out on the streets celebrating the death of some revolutionary martyr or saint. And they'll write a new playbook for this movement. I really believe that.

And also let me just say because of Iranian pride, they will want it this way. There are a lot of people who say, "Oh, we should help them; we should give them money; we should do this or that." Don't take this away from the Iranians. They have '53 when the CIA did it for them. They want to do this on their own and I think they can.

Ms. Ellis: Barbara, I'm going to take a few questions together.

Cheyenne Tray: Executive for a Fortune 500 Company. First, I'd like to echo what you said about the Internet's role. For example, the Global Internet Freedom Consortium, that has provided anti-jamming and anti-censorship software; they have got 120 million hits a day because of what's going on. My question is two-fold. One is, what are the lessons learned and signals being sent to other repressive regimes given how the Obama Administration handled this? And as an average citizen, what can we do to help?

Eileen O'Connor: Eileen O'Conner, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman. In your remarks you named a number of public people in Iran, some elected officials, some government officials, and said that they had not accepted the results. I wanted you to comment more on what that means. I'm gathering it has no legal import, but that it does have some ramifications.

Steve Ives: I wanted you to comment a little bit about the other clock that's ticking.

Ms. Slavin: Ah, the nuclear clock.

Mr. Ives: The nuclear clock. One of the important motivations for the Obama Administration is the fact that the Iranians are enriching uranium at the rate of a kilo and a half a day.

Ms. Slavin: Starting with the question about the Internet. There is a program called Tor which was invented by the Navy to allow ships to communicate with each other, and Iranians are downloading this like crazy. It allows you to use other proxies, servers, all around the world, not in your own country or not in your locale. They are finding ways to communicate with each other on the Internet.

As far as a signal to other regimes, I think that each case is really individual and specific. I assume that the Obama Administration is evaluating each on its own merits. I don't think you

can easily compare an Iran to a Myanmar to a North Korea. I mean, they're just so different. So I don't know that it sends any particular signal, except that it's important to say that you care about human rights. One thing that's been interesting about Obama – he tries not to make it an American thing. He talks about international norms and principles which I think is also very important, because this is really for the international community to deal with both in terms of the nuclear program, human rights violations, and so on. He's told the Iranian government, "You're on the wrong side of history." Your regime says it wants respect – in my book I call them the Rodney Dangerfield of nations – they can never get enough respect. Well if you want respect, you have to earn respect. And you have to show respect to your own people. He really captures that in that way.

In terms of what average citizens can do? Stay interested. Ask for information. You know, when Michael Jackson died and all of a sudden for three days CNN was nothing but Michael Jackson; it was like Iran didn't even exist anymore. I said, 'Wait a minute here; it's sad he died and all, but is that the only news there is for three days?' At least not in my newspaper; we kept having front page stories about Iran, and I'm generating more copy about it. Stay interested and demand that of your media. Call in and demand, write letters to the editors, that they don't waste endless pages on Michael Jackson when they could be writing about something important.

In terms of these people who didn't accept the results, these are pillars of the regime. You have to understand that they narrowed the field from several hundred to four candidates. Four candidates were allowed to run. Of those four, only one, the alleged victor, has accepted the results. The other three have not conceded. Not any of them have conceded; they all challenge the results. Now how can you pretend to have any kind of even quasi-democracy if you don't have concession speeches from the three people who were allegedly defeated? They all say that the results were bogus. And then I mentioned others. Qom is where they have all the senior clerics of the Shia Muslim faith for Iran. And three or four of them are what are known as grand ayatollahs – they are very senior revered figures – and they have rejected the results as well. And I mentioned two former presidents: one is Mohammed Khatami and the other is Rafsanjani, who has also, how shall I put it, not embraced Ahmadinejad yet. So the government can say over and over again – we've now had the Supreme Leader affirm the results the next day. We've had the Guardian Council twice now affirm the results. Then they had a so-called recount, and they affirmed the results again. I mean, they can continue, but I don't see how it's going to work.

The nuclear clock is a very important question. For many years the conventional wisdom was that the nuclear clock was ticking faster than the democracy clock, so you have to make a deal, try to make a deal with the Iranian regime to cap the nuclear program before they would be able to build a bomb. I think what's happened in the last few weeks suggests that the democracy clock might be ticking a little faster than we thought and that it might be premature to rush to make a deal on the nuclear issue with this government. Plus, as I've mentioned before, I'm not sure you can make a deal with this government. They have lost so much legitimacy over these last few weeks – the only thing they have left is the nuclear program. How are they going to bargain that away or put significant limits on it? I just find it hard to believe; it would be such an incredible reversal. And the nuclear program has been touted as this focus for nationalism and Iranian pride, so if you give that away, then what do you have? So I'm not persuaded that can work.

Colombe De Nicolay: My name is Colombe De Nicolay. I am an international worker, and I work in Tehran. I would think how divided the regime is; are there indications that the line of division [could spread to the security forces] at this point?

Elizabeth Thompson: Elizabeth Thompson from the Woodrow Wilson Center. Thank you, Barbara. Perhaps information that goes back to your past visits, because we have so little information right now. But, on the resources of the opposition at hand, could you clarify what the power of the Assembly of Experts is regarding possibly removing Khamenei. And expand a little bit on your own article about the willingness of mullahs to be written out of history for the first time. The second is about popular opposition. We got so much on Tehran demonstrations, and I have two questions regarding that. One is the degree to which they perpetrated violence. The striking thing about the '79 Revolution was that the crowds were so nonviolent, but we had some accounts of attacks on the basijis. But second, are there, from your previous visits – speaking about individuals on the Internet – are there not underground organizations? Is there no at-hand network amongst people that they can draw on? Has the regime been that repressive?

Ms. Slavin: On divisions in the security services, there have been some anecdotal accounts of members of the Basij – this is a paramilitary organization primarily for young people that has been used to put down the demonstrations; they've been bringing people in from outside Tehran, from rural areas, smaller cities – there has been some anecdotal evidence that some of these people didn't want to be involved in this activity. But there have been no significant splits. There was one report of a Revolutionary Guard commander who had broken with the regime, but I haven't seen that confirmed. But as I mentioned, Mohsen Rezai is a former commander of the Revolutionary Guard and the mayor of Tehran is a former air force commander of the Revolutionary Guard, and they have not embraced the results of this election. And I'm sure they have circles of influence that they could call on. So that may yet happen.

On the Assembly of Experts and the mullahs. This is a body of 86 clerics. It is led by Rafsanjani. Anyway, this body has been toothless. Has been toothless but Rafsanjani is the head of it. And if the situation becomes really dire, it is conceivable that this body would move in and would remove the Supreme Leader; it has that power. But the situation would have to get much, much worse, I think, for that to happen. Really violent, blood in the streets, chaos in the economy, nationwide strikes, the sort of thing that we saw during the first Revolution – and that hasn't happened. And we don't know if that's going to happen. But it is a possibility, and it is a way that under the constitution of the Islamic Republic you could remove the leader.

In terms of what's happening outside, again, it's anecdotal, there have been demonstrations in other places, other major cities: Shiraz, Isfahan, Mashhad. They're not covered. So you get little clips that are posted on YouTube, of scenes in various places, but it's hard to verify.

In terms of an underground network: I don't know that people are that organized yet. During the Revolution you had the mosque networks. People would gather in mosques, and this was one of the ways in which they would pass information. They had tapes of Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches that they would be sent in from Paris and passed around. The Islamic Republic has succeeded in destroying religion in the country. Most Iranians are not terribly religious anymore, because it's been forced down their throats, and so you don't have a mosque network anymore;

you don't have any respect for the neighborhood cleric, and so they're going to have to figure out a new form of organization that does not go through mosques. You have the university students who are always fairly ripe for events. The schools are closed now for the summer. But what happens when they open up again in the fall? Are you going to be able to be keeping the campuses quiet? I doubt it, I really doubt it. And you have the influence of the diaspora and the effects of things like the Persian Service of the BBC which has been the most important element. You were talking about democracy promotion and so on, but it's really been a Persian Service of the BBC that has reported the news more accurately than anybody, I think. And a lot of what we get and report – I have my Iranian-Americans who are watching the Persian BBC and telling me what's on the Persian BBC.

So the news will come out, it will filter, go in a circle, and go back to Iran again, and I think it will continue and bubble along, simmer, and burst out here or there, but it will continue.

Ms. Ellis: I just have one last question, I was just wondering: Iran's power in the region was growing for a variety of reasons. I'm just wondering how you see the turmoil having an impact on their power in the region. In relation to Iraq, or just other countries.

Ms. Slavin: Well, it can go two different ways. One of my fears is that because of the mess in the country, they are going to become even more aggressive outside: try to provoke the United States, try to provoke others, so the attention is turned away from internal [affairs]. And all these bombings in Iraq, now I don't know who's behind them, but the Iranians provide a lot of explosive devices and what-not. They have mixed views on Iraq. I would assume they would want it to be relatively smooth because they want the US to leave. But I wouldn't put it past them. We've got Afghanistan that's another possibility. US is surging troops into Afghanistan now. It's a possibility.

The other side of the spectrum is that they may feel a need to call some of these people home to protect the home front. There even have been credible reports of Arab fighters – members of Hezbollah and other groups – that have actually been imported into Iran to help put down the demonstrations. And I have people that I know say that they have heard Arabs speaking Arabic in and among the Basij putting people down at the demonstrations. But at the same time I think this has been a real blow to the image of the Islamic Republic for many of its so-called constituencies, and that includes Hezbollah in Lebanon, which just lost an election, by the way – maybe a harbinger of things to come. We don't know what will happen with Hamas; we don't know what will happen with Syria. It's a very good opportunity for the US to try to peel Syria away from Iran a little bit. The US is sending an ambassador back to Syria, a very important move. I think there are some real opportunities there for, especially with this Administration and its outreach to the Muslim world, the language to the Muslim world – a good opportunity to raise its own profile and to see Iran's profile diminished a little bit. As I've said, I mean, they pretended they were better than everybody else, and now they've shown that they're not, and that's very powerful.

Ms. Ellis: We've come to the end of this wonderful meeting. Thank you so much, this has really helped us understand. Thank you all for coming, and we hope to see you all soon.