



# Press Release

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## West's failure to successfully engage with Iran is because it doesn't understand the Islamic Republic

**HUGH BARNES**, Director of Democracy and Conflict at The Foreign Policy Centre and co-author of 'Understanding Iran', speaking ahead of the launch of the FPC's report said:

"The West's failure to engage successfully with Iran is due to a failure to understand the structure of the Iranian regime and the background to recent political changes.

"The diplomatic crisis sparked by Iran's nuclear programme has focussed attention on the balance of forces within the Islamic Republic. Some analysts have claimed that Iran is divided into reformers and conservatives – a gross simplification.

"The reality of today's Iran is extremely complex – with diverse and diffuse bases of power. The FPC pamphlet 'Understanding Iran' maps out the various power bases, political and theocratic, using diagrams as well as text, and assesses the strength of the opposition and civil society in order to ask whether the real divide in Iran lies between the hardliners and the reformers, as commonly believed, or between the people and the regime.

"Almost nine months after the election, the political situation remains in flux, and therefore it is wrong to perceive a clear-cut position *vis-à-vis* the West inside Iran, represented by Ahmadinejad. In fact, he is seen by a lot of the 'old guard' as very dangerous, and the regime is divided - *There is a power struggle in the upper echelons of its regime.*

"Khamenei responded to the neo-conservative victory at the polls by entrenching the position of Expediency Council chairman, Rafsanjani, the loser in the election, and thereby officially endorsing Rafsanjani's status as Number Two in the Iranian leadership. At this point, Rafsanjani oversees the three branches of Iran's regime. It was significant, for example, that Rafsanjani upstaged his rival Ahmadinejad, on 11 April, by revealing Iran's nuclear enrichment 'breakthrough' ahead of the president's televised speech. One of Rafsanjani's first steps when the Expediency Council received its extended powers was to bring the outgoing President of Iran, Mohammad Khatami – identified with the reform-seekers – back to the political arena, and to appoint him senior advisor to the council."

**STEPHEN TWIGG**, Director of the Foreign Policy Centre said:

"The Foreign Policy Centre is launching an Iran programme because we believe it is essential that UK policy on Iran is well informed and because we want to engage with the various reformist elements in Iran; both inside and outside the structures of power. There is potential for political dialogue, economic ties and cultural contacts to act as catalysts for the strengthening of civil society in Iran."

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For more information or a copy of the report, please contact Alex Bigham on  
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**ALEX BIGHAM, Head of Communications at The Foreign Policy Centre and co-author of 'Understanding Iran'** said:

"The only long-term solution to Iran's problems is democracy, but it cannot be dictated, Iraq-style, or it will backfire. It can only be encouraged, through dialogue and open economic activity.

"Iran may seem superficially like Iraq – a potentially straightforward military target which would lead to a disastrous fallout, but in fact we need to treat Iran more like Libya. Diplomatic engagement must be allowed to run its course – there need to be bigger carrots as well as bigger sticks.

"The deal in December 2003, by which Libya pledged to disclose and dismantle all its WMD programmes in return for Western initiatives on trade and foreign investment, shows that painstaking diplomacy can result in a peaceful outcome to the nuclear stand-off."

**The FPC pamphlet makes the following 8 policy recommendations.** "The West should show a big carrot to the Iranian people and a big stick to the Iranian government by:

- limiting sanctions for Iran's breaches of its NPT obligations to issues affecting nuclear cooperation;
- offering carrots to Russia and China, such as enhanced cooperation on nuclear R&D, in order to maintain the unanimity of the Security Council;
- clarifying the definition of 'civil nuclear power' in the NPT, and setting up a framework to bring all countries in the Middle East under the NPT, with even-handed measures for non-compliance to be applied across the board;
- promoting economic, cultural, educational and social exchanges as a way of empowering the Iranian people and, ultimately, forcing the regime to loosen its restrictive practices;
- expanding contacts with high-level Iranian political circles to investigate the likely shape of a regional security settlement, if one is indeed possible, that addresses both US and Iranian concerns;
- exploring the potential for a long-term regional security settlement through, for instance, a Montreux-like convention to demilitarise the Straits of Hormuz;
- adopting much clearer deadlines and triggers in its demands upon Iran so that there is no doubt about US intentions;
- referring Iran to the UN Security Council if it continues to support terrorism."

## **ENDS**

### **Editor's Notes**

1. The Foreign Policy Centre will launch '**Understanding Iran**' a report on the political structures and power of the Iranian regime on **19<sup>th</sup> April 2006** at **12pm in the Thatcher Room, Portcullis House, Houses of Parliament**, London SW1A 0AA. Advance media copies will be available – please contact [alex.bigham@fpc.org.uk](mailto:alex.bigham@fpc.org.uk) or call 020 7388 6662.
2. **The full text of 'Understanding Iran' a Foreign Policy Centre report to be launched on 19 April 2006 is attached (pdf 347k)**