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**CSIS-SCHIEFFER DIALOGUE:
OPENING STEPS FOR A DIPLOMATIC PATH BETWEEN THE
U.S. AND IRAN**

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MR. SCHWARTZ: Good morning everyone. Good morning. Welcome to CSIS, the Center for Strategic International Studies. I'm afraid I'm a poor substitute for Dr. John Hamre, our CEO who, despite wanting to be here so badly to hear this terrific presentation we have, couldn't be here today.

Thank you for coming to CSIS. The first thing I want to say is many of you know that we have this fantastic partnership with Bob Schieffer through the Schieffer School of Journalism down at TCU in Fort Worth. We'll be continuing those forums again in the fall. I hope many of you can join us. But in the meantime, please enjoy this extraordinary gathering we have here today. And with that, I'll throw it to Bob.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, hello everyone. And this really is quite a duo that we've got here on the same stage with David Ignatius. And I'll have to tell you, if there's anybody here – I'm not going to go through the long biographies in introduction because I think there truly are two gentlemen here that we don't need introductions for – but I would say this. I'm almost like an outsider because the three of them have a book coming out in September. And how does it work, David? You sort of moderate the discussion between these two gentlemen?

DAVID IGNATIUS: This is conversations between Zbig and Brent about the future of American foreign policy, the way the world has changed in recent years, and what to do about – obviously written on the eve of the presidential election. And my role is to do what journalists do, which is ask a few questions and otherwise keep out of sight. But these two have a lot to say and it's a good read.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right, and the working title – they were trying to tell me backstage that the working title is “We could have done it a lot better.” (Laughter.) I'm told that's not really the title.

MR. IGNATIUS: I added the phrase of Brent's, “and did.” (Laughter.) But the actual title is “America in the World.”

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, the way we're going to work today is David and I are going to kind of ask the questions. And we'll hear from Dr. Brzezinski and General Scowcroft and get their answers. Would you like to start off, David?

MR. IGNATIUS: Well, let me start by asking about the most immediate news event that we have, which is Saturday's meeting in Geneva. Ballyhooed in U.S. media as a breakthrough because of the attendance of our Undersecretary of State Bill Burns who is there with the permanent five U.N. representatives plus one, as it's called, meeting with the Iranian representative Said Jalili for what were described as consultations to see if a period of pre-negotiation under the P5 plus one proposal for so-called freeze for freeze –

us freezing sanctions; them freezing expansion of their nuclear program – to see if that could make some progress.

And I'd be interested in your evaluation. Most of the news reports have said not much happened. And whether you think that's characteristic of where the Iranians are and are likely to be, how we could make more progress in the future, and what you see going ahead, not just over the next few weeks but into the next administration.

GENERAL BRENT SCOWCROFT (RET.): I think it's premature to make a judgment whether it was a breakthrough for Bill Burns to go or not but it was a very positive statement because what it did is bring the United States solidly in with the Europeans, the Russians, and the Chinese as a solid front. And that's something that has not been there before. And the Iranians have been able to play one off against the other. I think one of the results is that there seems to be a greater solidarity among the six.

I think the Iranian reaction was disappointing but typical. Iran has great difficulty negotiating or deciding on a particular strategy. It is not a monolithic organization. And whether this represents they couldn't come to an agreement on how to respond to the five plus one or whether this was just more obfuscation, I think it's premature to tell. Or is it testing? I think Ahmadinejad, for example, has demonstrated to his satisfaction that the way to increase his support in Iran is to tweak the U.S. table and get some sharp statements out of him, and then get some nationalist reaction.

So I think it's premature. But I hope we can be thoughtful in going the next step.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, Dr. Brzezinski, that is a much different take than we heard from the secretary of state. She said that the Iranians were meandering around, that they weren't even serious. I mean, she was very, very dismissive. Where do you come down on this meeting?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: I think that the presence of the undersecretary was a very good step. It certainly draws the United States more into the direct process. Talk of a consular section in Tehran is also, I think, a positive step forward. But the basic issue remains fundamentally as it has been in the past. Namely, we are essentially insisting on Iran making a fundamental concession as a precondition for negotiating with it. And I think that is the real problem.

I think it is very difficult to imagine the Iranian government, convoluted and weak and divided as it is, agreeing to give up something that it feels it has a right to – and under international law, under NPT, it does – as a concession for the right to negotiate with the six, including the United States. It seems to me that if the logjam on this issue is to be broken, one of two different ways to proceed has to be accepted. Either the Iranians concede on the issue of enrichment at the start of the negotiating process, in return for which we lift some significant sanctions against them at the start of the negotiating process so that there is a quid pro quo, or both sides agree to negotiate without preconditions, with perhaps the six – and particularly the United States – saying in

advance that we will not let the negotiations be indefinitely dragged out while the Iranians continue to enrich. But to insist that in advance of the negotiations, the Iranians concede the fundamental issue, I think, creates a situation which runs the risk of being a stalemate or even worse.

And the problem is complicated further by the fact that not only is the Iranian government divided, in some respects weak, the United States government is in a similar condition. And then in the background, the Israeli government is also in a similar condition. So we have three governments interacting – one of them in the background but very deeply involved – all of them divided within, uncertain how to proceed, and sometimes acting in an inconsistent fashion.

What the secretary of state said regarding Iran certainly was not helpful to the advancement of the negotiating process. But it goes further back than that. When we proposed on June 12th to have the comprehensive deal – this is the comprehensive proposal – if there is a positive outcome, it would involve a lot of steps, constructive steps. The president within two days announced that the Iranians had rejected it. And then, a few days later, the president announced that the Iranians had stated that they want nuclear weapons so that they can kill people. No one can find any trace of such a statement. So we are dealing here with a situation that is complicated by political dynamics, a lot of hostility, and a great deal of clumsiness.

MR. SCHIEFFER: What do you think – the basic question – what do the Iranians want here?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: I think what they want, basically, is to be able to pursue the nuclear program towards an objective, which it is very difficult to conclude what it exactly is. But presumably, at the very least, it aims at giving Iran a capability similar to what Japan possesses today.

MR. SCHIEFFER: In other words –

MR. BRZEZINSKI: That is to say, to be a peace-oriented nuclear power with a capacity for rapid acquisition of nuclear weapons if they decide to go that way.

GEN. SCOWCROFT: I think they want something a little broader than that. And that is that they want a recognition that they have security problems, that they live in a very difficult region of the world, that they fought a war against Iraq, an invasion by Iraq, for eight years. And they have real problems. And we tend to act as if they don't have a problem; they're creating a problem for us by intervening in Iraq and by wanting nuclear weapons.

Their claim is, the only reason they insist on doing the nuclear part all by themselves is that they have been subject to political pressure by the Russians, by the United States, that will cut off their ability, so they have to have their own sources of supply. That might very well be disingenuous.

But you know, you have to get at the kind of arguments that they have. I think we've made a slight step in the direction Zbig said we have to go. What he was talking about is our fundamental statement that they have to suspend enrichment before we'll talk to them. Well, this latest demand is a step back from that. All we're asking that they do is not increase their level of enrichment. And we will not impose the new sanctions that have been voted. Now, that is a step forward.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: For six weeks.

GEN. SCOWCROFT: Well, that's all right. But it's a step beyond asking them to stop something that they're doing before we'll talk.

MR. IGNATIUS: Just a small point of information on this question of the centrifuges, which is interesting. I don't know what to make of it. But the people around Javier Solana, the EU foreign minister, in effect, say that they've been told by the IAEA that the Iranians are spinning almost no centrifuges at present. In other words, they are in fact – it could be argued – meeting the demand that's made for this preliminary phase of talks without saying so publicly. And so there is some discussion, maybe there is a face-saving way for the IAEA to announce what is in fact the case and then the Iranians confirm it.

I just would add to what Brent and Zbig have said that in my own conversations as a journalist with Iranian officials, a couple of things really come clear. The first is that they see this as their moment. I mean, quite frankly, they think they're on a roll. They think that the United States is weak, that we have bungled in Iraq, that that has accrued to their enormous advantage, and that we don't know what to do in terms of getting out.

There's quite a lot of debate within Iran if you look at translations of the Iranian press about how they should capitalize on this moment of opportunity. Is this the moment to press even harder and drive us in humiliation from the Gulf? There is the hardline faction that says that. Or is it instead the time to negotiate, consolidate their gains, and enter into some kind of serious negotiation.

The thing that I keep being reminded of by Iranians is that in the end, for the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, who presumably calls the shots here to the extent anyone does, the primary goal, the obligation as supreme leader, is to preserve the legitimacy of the Islamic revolution. And there is a view in Iran that negotiating with the United States is in some way a compromise of the purity of that revolution. So I think there is a tremendous wariness in Iran to go this next step. I think that's why for a good long while their answer to our requests, proposals, timetables, is likely to be maybe and not a definite yes, or a definite no for that matter.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Vice President Cheney's daughter who was the official in the administration fairly recently was at our symposium on Iran here a couple weeks ago. And she said, the real question now is not whether we're continuing to negotiate or

whether we should negotiate, but whether – and she says we should answer the question – can we live with a nuclear-armed Iran? Can we?

MR. BRZEZINSKI: We have lived with a nuclear-armed Soviet Union for 60 years now. And we have lived with a nuclear-armed China for 44 years. We have lived with a nuclear-armed Pakistan and India for what a decade or so. We have lived with a nuclear-armed Israel for probably two or three decades – two decades probably. So first of all, we do know historically that deterrence does work. We also know historically that preventive wars very often do not work, and in some cases produce consequences that one would not have wished for if one had had the foresight to think about them.

And if we get into a war with Iran, we know there will be a disaster. We know there will be a disaster. And the United States would become involved in a four-front war, probably for roughly two decades – Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Persian Gulf. And just think what a few medium-range, short-range rockets fired into the Strait of Hormuz would do to the price of oil and to the global economy. So we know that a war with Iran will be a disaster.

We also know that deterrence has worked historically. Now, someone might say, well, but it might not work with Iran. The most you can say is it might not work with Iran. But you have to ask yourself what is the calculus here? What are the rational factors that justify the thought that perhaps deterrence might not work?

Well, what sort of state is Iran? It is a state that has existed for a long, long time, much longer than we have existed. It is a state with a tradition of statecraft. It is a state which acts deviously, with calculation – sometimes aggressively, sometimes not – but generally very rational. And last but not least, is it a state which, if it gets its first bomb – let's say two or three, four years from now – will immediately shoot it at Israel or give it to Hezbollah? What is the rational calculus here that justifies the conclusion that that is very probable? The fact is there isn't.

So yes, I think deterrence would work. I'm not happy about that prospect. I think there is a real danger that if Iran gets nuclear weapons or seems to be getting them, it will produce an effect on the states and the region who may wish also to acquire equal capabilities. And that would be disturbing. That's why there is a serious problem here, which has to be negotiated seriously.

But I'm willing to say explicitly that I think a war with Iran would produce calamities for sure. Deterrence has worked and it has a high probability of working.

GEN. SCOWCROFT: With all respect, I think that's the wrong question. I think that militarizes the view. And I think the whole question, as Zbig touched on it right at the end there, is I think we're standing on the brink of another forward surge in proliferation. It's not nearly so much just will Iran develop a nuclear capability. But the consequences would be you would have Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey in the region and then who knows who else around the world would want to do the same thing just to

prepare themselves for a different kind of a world. And we can have 30, 40 countries months away from a nuclear. That is not a better world. And to me, that's what we're really focusing on. And to me, whether or not Iran itself has it is a less important question than what it will do to proliferation around the world.

MR. SCHIEFFER: So where do we go from here then?

GEN. SCOWCROFT: So I think, to me that is the imperative. Don't talk about, well, do we bomb them now or do we bomb them after they get the weapon. That's not the point. The point is how can we dissuade Iran from its current course of action? And one of the arguments is they don't improve their own security by doing that. They may get a jump of a few years on their neighbors. But their neighbors will respond. And they will be less secure rather than more secure.

That's why I think this dialogue is so important and why the question, well, do we bomb them now to prevent them from getting, or do we wait until they get it and bomb them then – I think that puts it in the wrong context.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: But the issue that Bob raised does get at the question, how do we negotiate? And implicit in our current negotiating posture is the notion perhaps merely tactically there – but it is there – to the effect that all options are on the table and one of these options is that we may initiate the use of force to prevent that very negative effect, that preemptive strike.

And my concern is twofold. First of all, I don't want the public to get the sense that the consequences of Iran maybe getting a nuclear capability are so horrendous that a preemptive attack on Iran is therefore justified because I think a preemptive attack on Iran would produce a calamity for sure. And therefore, I don't think that is a good possibility to entertain.

Secondly, the reason I am against actually keeping this notion of all the options being on the table is that I think it inhibits, obstructs a serious negotiating process because it has two negative effects. It convinces the Iranians that they are being threatened and that in fact maybe they ought to have nuclear weapons because then we wouldn't be threatening them. And secondly, it also tends to push the Iranians into a more nationalistic, dogmatic stand uniting them against us. Despite the fact that so much of the Iranian population, in fact, doesn't care for the mullahs, would prefer to have a better relationship with the U.S., but is patriotic and feels their country is being threatened, they'll unite. So I happen to think the notion of keeping the option of the use of force on the table is counterproductive in a very significant fashion.

GEN. SCOWCROFT: Well, I think we're sort of saying the same thing. It's militarizing the problem. And we have a tendency to do that because it gives you a good clean-cut answer to what is probably one of the most complex diplomatic situations we face now with Iran. It's very hard to negotiate with them. We've got six on our side. I don't think any of the six want Iran to have nuclear weapons. But there are all different

kinds of motives underneath that. Iran is divided internally and they are exquisite negotiators in any case. So just finding out what their interests are and whose interests – is it Ahmadinejad's? Is it Khamenei? Is it the IRG? Who are you talking to? It's a very difficult problem. And by putting it in these military terms – you say you either do this or you do that – and it makes it all look so simple and clean-cut.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: And there is a further danger involved in that – and I think quite right, Brent – there is a further danger involved in that by sort of stating casually all options are on the table, which means use of military force is on the table. We are perhaps unintentionally legitimating the idea of the use of force. And we may choose not to use force. But by legitimating it, including to our own public, we tempt the Israelis even more to use force because we are in effect saying it's a legitimate option. Okay, we're not exercising it but the Israelis are exercising it.

And I think that would be calamity too because if the Israelis strike at Iran, the Iranians really at this stage don't have much of a capability to respond painfully against the Israelis, so they will respond against us. And then, all of the consequences that I have talked about would be set in motion. So I don't think it is really a serious option. The real option is to keep negotiating, be very tough on the sanctions, adopt more sanctions, make it more painful for the Iranians. But at the same time, give them options, openings. That is to say, don't insist at the very beginning that they abandon enrichment, but give them something for it if they do at the same time.

MR. IGNATIUS: There are signs of a real debate in Iran about what to do. Ali Akhbar of the Laiati (ph) who is an advisor to the supreme leader has been quoted publicly as calling into question the super hardline policies of Ahmadinejad. The way in which Ahmadinejad and his circle went out of their way to attack the Laiati tells you that they take that criticism seriously and that they're concerned. So that's one thing to think about. There is a real debate there. How does what we do play into that debate?

To return to a question that we've discussed in preparing this book that will be published in September, there is the question of what the next administration should do, because all of this really is a preliminary for what comes after January 20. The Iranians are watching the clock. They know that time is running out and there is a way in which this really is a sort of preliminary exercise.

And the question I'm curious about from both of you is the Iranians have elections coming up too, starting in March. And in a sense, the worst thing that we could do in terms of our long-term strategic problem with Iran would be to embark on a negotiating course that strengthens the worst of the worst, so that Ahmadinejad could say to the Iranian people, look, see, the softline policies of President Khatami gave you the axis of evil. And my hard line has brought the Americans begging, pleading for negotiations. And so, he would go into the elections with a much stronger hand, and the likelihood that we'd have the worst outcome possible would be greater.

On the other hand, you could go more slowly and you could say Iran needs to decide what kind of country it's going to be. And the presidential elections are the way to do that, you know, and do things that withhold the prize from Ahmadinejad. Suggest that the prize is likely to be won by a different sort of person, a Larajani, if he runs. But that would mean, Zbig and Brent, some delay in the new administration making this important gesture. So I'm just curious about how you, as former national security advisors, would think about the timing of this process.

GEN. SCOWCROFT: I think it could play either way. But I think we ought to move slowly and deliberately. I agree with you that, for example, Condi's rather sharp response could play into the hands of Ahmadinejad – tough. On the other hand, the sanctions are having an effect. And Total now, the French oil producer, has backed away from developing a very major gas field in Iran. The Iranian economy is in terrible shape. All the other oil producers are riding high. Iran is in bad shape. That doesn't help Ahmadinejad.

So we've got to think. How are they playing it? What helps us? What hurts them? How are they provoking us to certain responses that will play to their internal? I don't know all the answers. But we need to be thinking very carefully about that.

I think that the notion, as Zbig said, we ought to be showing a solid line on sanctions, but giving them a way out, letting them quietly, without losing face, slide into something. Take them up, for example, on their proposition. They don't nuclear weapons; they just want nuclear power. And propose to them a procedure by which we or the Russians or somebody will provide them with nuclear fuel. We'll even escrow the fuel under control of the U.N. So as long as the IAEA says they're abiding by the rules, they're guaranteed to have that fuel. We can subsidize the fuel at a price that they can't begin to meet. And make it as appealing as possible, again, to the Iranian people, so when they have an election, they say, well, that's not a bad idea.

MR. IGNATIUS: Could we verify that they were in fact sticking to the terms of that bargain? Your idea is you take them at their word. If Khamenei keeps saying we do not desire or intend to build nuclear weapons. We're an Islamic republic; that is against our charter. Say, okay; we'll take you at your word. Could we then verify that they were in fact not proceeding further than the limits of the nuclear program?

GEN. SCOWCROFT: I think we could if – but not if they were able to enrich their own uranium because then, if they have that capability, they just kick the inspectors out. If they don't have the raw material, they can do it.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I'm sorry. Why don't you, if you'd like to respond or say something on that. Then we'll go to the audience.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Well, I would like to build on what Brent was saying. You know, in the proposal that the six gave to the Iranians on June 14th, it is stated that the six would be prepared to engage the Iranians in very serious negotiations regarding how to

expand a constructive relationship with Iran, if Iran ceases enriching its uranium in the area of nuclear energy and a series of topics are listed. In the area of political relationships, quite a few steps are listed – in the economic cooperation area, in energy partnership, in agriculture, in environment, in civil aviation, in environment, in civil litigation, in humanitarian or human development issues, and so forth; it's a good list, it's a good list.

What strikes me is why don't we actually say to the Iranians. If you are willing to suspend enrichment, we will then respond in these areas instantly with several very concrete, positive steps, including some lifting of the sanctions by the United States. Then it's easier for the Iranians, those Iranians who want to make a deal with the West, to say to the others look, we're getting something. We're getting something very significant for suspending enrichment. And then that would give us time to negotiate with the Iranians, how to work out some arrangement whereby they could, in fact, have the uranium they need, either by indigenous enrichment under some international supervision or some international alternative. But the process would be launched. Right now, we are saying to them, you have to give up that which is critical to your program, after which we'll sit down and discuss this shopping list of nice things. And maybe we'll give you some, maybe we won't; we'll see how the negotiations go.

So I think that is a problem. And that problem, then – and that's pertinent to the issue that was raised earlier, the next administration – that problem, I think, is going to be most acute between now and January 21 of next year because if the process breaks down, I think there are some residual elements in the U.S. administration that are dented by the idea that perhaps the issue could be resolved by the use of force, the option that is on the table. The Israelis may be tempted because they obviously are watching what's going on, and there's some evidence in Israeli which obviously are attempted as well. And that would then be a calamity.

If we can manage to go through these next few months with this process still somehow kept alive, then my guess is that, if the Democrats win the elections, there will be more of an inclination to try to flesh out these various generalized footsteps. If the Republicans win, I think that depends on something which is very difficult for me to judge at this stage, but that is what will be the distribution of influence within the McCain administration. If the McCain administration has Senator Lieberman as secretary of State or Mr. Giuliani as secretary of Defense, I think we'll still be faced with the possibility of a serious military condition. If it is an alternative orientation, Armitage and others, also for McCain – if McCain turns to some illustrious Republicans who have served this country so well over many decades, whose initials might be B.S. –

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: And we will all be very real, sure.

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Why don't we go to some questions in the audience? David Sanger, of the New York Times, is sitting in the front row. David reminded me of the very interesting – really, a lovely anecdote in Dr. Brzezinski's history. Why don't you tell us about that, David?

GEN. SCOWCROFT: He looks like he's on vacation.

(Laughter.)

Q: This isn't vacation?

(Laughter.)

Q: I think the answer that Mr. Schieffer was referring to was your – Dr. Brzezinski, your first encounter with the Iranians in 1979 in Algiers, in a negotiation. I think you had – it resulted maybe three days later in the taking of the hostages –

DR. BRZEZINSKI: No, no, no. (Laughter.) You've got your history mixed up because an overthrow of that particular – (inaudible) – yeah.

Q: That group, everybody in that government was gone, and the hostages were taken very shortly –

DR. BRZEZINSKI: Six months later, yeah.

Q: Six months later. (Laughter.)

DR. BRZEZINSKI: History, history.

Q: The question I was going to ask – and I'd like to hear what you had to say about the Algiers meeting and what lessons sort of emerged from that – but the question I was going to ask was that it seemed to me that General Scowcroft was basically making the argument that, under any circumstance, we can't allow a single centrifuge to spin in Iran because you'll never know if they keep spinning, if I heard you right, whether or not they have a secret program that goes on elsewhere. That's my question to all of you is, is it too late for that. Since they've got 3400 centrifuges spinning, have they learned enough at this point that, even if they slowed it down or stopped it, it wouldn't make any difference? That they're beyond that point where they understand how to start up a secret program easily, if they need to?

GEN. SCOWCROFT: I think yes, they could start it up again, but you know, this is not – centrifuge building is not high science; it's engineering technology and it's awfully hard to do. Those things have to spin at incredible rates of speed for years in a coordinated series. That's a very hard thing to do, and you can get one – you know, they probably have a model, whether it's from Pakistan or from North Korea or – not from North Korea, from Pakistan, maybe. And they modified their own, apparently, with some

Iranian characteristic. Having 500 of them working is not having 5,000 of them working, and so yes, they're a long way – and no, I do not think it's too late, though. I don't think it's too late. I think I'm more cautious than Zbig about letting them have a limited capability because that increases the chance – or increases the speed with which they can break out. So I think our goal ought to be to negotiate a permanent suspension of enrichment, in exchange for a guaranteed supply of enriched uranium, at a price far below anything they can do by enriching it themselves, make it as attractive as possible. It might not work, but that's where I'd start.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And would you identify yourself, please, when you take the mike.

Q: Valere Girale (ph), a foreign correspondent for Le Figaro. I've interviewed several times Mr. Larigenie (ph); he wanted to be – I mean, I suggested in an editorial one year ago that – (inaudible) – should be an honest broker between America and Iran. He liked the idea and invited me – in Tehran, he put it in Le Figaro that yes, France should be on as broker. And then it didn't work for two reasons. One is that Kouchner tried but didn't try hard; it was some people around Sarkozy were very close to neo-con and you know, were divided. I mean, it didn't work and the French didn't try hard, I mean, though Larigenie helped the French with the La Celle Saint-Cloud conference, Hezbollah coming to France and of course, Larigenie then, had this fight with Ahmadinejad and left the Supreme Council.

So one of the things that I've been speaking with the Iranians, and I wanted you to tell me your opinion on that, is do you think there is a solution that would be some kind of consortium or some kind of international zone franche where enrichment could be continued, but under permanent monitoring from the inter-agency, the problem being that it's very difficult, like Mr. Brzezinski said, to ask the Iranian government publicly to say that I stop what I think is my right.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: Well, I'm not, you know, technically versed enough to give you a categorical response. But one of the points that has been made in the proposal to the Iranians is that any arrangement regarding enrichment and international assurances that enrichment is not threatening, is not being diverted to weaponry, would be an arrangement that would be applicable to all states that are party to the NPT. So that if there is going to be some arrangement worked out, it will have to involve also the engagement of other countries that are enriching and obtain their acquiescence, their participation in some arrangement that would involve the Iranians. So that is a real complication. Until that is worked out, presumably some system of much tighter and much more frequent inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency would be a substitute.

But all of that, in my view, can be obtained only in a process in which the Iranians are not compelled to accept that as a precondition for negotiations. To me, that is the main stumbling block and the main threat it posed to the viability of the negotiating process. And if the negotiating process breaks down between now and the end of the

year, then the temptations for some to take action are going to be great and there will be, to some extent, even a degree of de facto psychological legitimization of the idea that the breakdown of the negotiating process justifies doing something which, in my judgment at least and I think the judgment of many, including Sarkozy, who said it would be a disaster, would be a genuine international calamity.

MR. IGNATIUS: Just, Bob, a point of information: The French, as my colleague from Le Figaro says, have tried to provide a bridge. Sarkozy extended an invitation to Valetie (ph), this man who's played an interesting role as a critic of Ahmadinejad. And Ahmadinejad brilliantly torpedoed his trip to Paris, making an inflammatory statement just before he arrived that virtually required Sarkozy to say things that blew things up. So you know, I think that the French are trying to do this.

You know, down the road, it seems to me it's very difficult for there to be an intermediary more important than Russia. We haven't talked about Russia's role on Saturday, but let me just say a few words about it, as described to me by people who were present. There, a representative whose name, I think, is Kisliak (ph) was said to be very concerned about the Iranian tone, the fact that they did not come to Geneva with any answer, yes or no answer, to this very detailed proposal for a freeze-for-freeze and, you know, this elaborate proposal that Zbig has been reading from, but instead came with generalities. The Russian is said to have tried to impress upon the Iranian delegate the importance of this moment, not to let it go, and so there's speculation that in the next several weeks before the next meeting, the Russians may lean on the Iranians to do something.

So I think, Zbig, while you've argued that a failure of this process in Geneva could be a prelude to a return to military action, what you hear from administration officials with an eye on the Russians is it may be a prelude to a return to the U.N. in the fall for a fourth set of sanctions that would – the Iranians don't like these sanctions. There should be no mistake about it. They do not like feeling isolated and they are particularly upset when the Russians join in the process, because they think the Russians are going to save them, in effect, from the U.S. So I think as people are looking at what comes after Saturday's meeting, a lot of what I hear is focus on the Russians and focus on keeping this group, the P5, together for the next round of sanctions.

DR. BRZEZINSKI: Well, you know, it's an interesting issue that's been raised. There are six parties to this process, one plus five. To the extent that one can generalize about that, it seems to me that the United States and the United Kingdom are very close together. With the United States, they become this very tough official. The most sort of prudent or patient, almost diplomatically focused, in my view, are the Germans and the Chinese. And the Chinese and the Germans are very sensitive to the economic consequences and the real collapse of the process, to spike the price of oil, not to speak of the consequences of the use of force. The French are a little bit esoteric – (laughter) – and their style is set by the personality of the president. And then, there is Russia.

Now, if you look at who would be the potential beneficiary of the real calamity, there's only one country and that's Russia. The Chinese would be hard-hit by the price of oil, the disruption of the flow of oil; devastating for their economy; the Germans also, the French also, but to a lesser extent than the Germans. And we and the British probably could manage with alternative sources, but at very high cost. The Russians would see the United States, which they still resent for our victory in the Cold War, bogged down for years to come, the price of oil skyrocketing. Yes, there may be some risks to them, but by and large not devastating.

I don't say that this is the Russian position, but I suspect that there are some geo-strategists in Russia who, when they look at this calculus, are not all that worried about the consequences of a breakdown and may not be in that much of a hurry to get that process resolved. But that's nothing that you say publicly; publicly, you always say you want, of course, a peaceful resolution, a compromise arrangement, and so forth. But I think there are different kinds of interests on the part of the participants, and that makes this whole process infinitely more complex than otherwise would be the case.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let me just ask one question because we haven't actually said it in these words: What should we be telling the Israelis right now, and how do they view all of this?

GEN. SCOWCROFT: Calm down. (Laughter.) Don't do it. I mean, look, if the United States, as a consequence of that, gets bogged down the way I fear it would, ultimately the victim of that will also be Israel because our position in that part of the world involves a protracted, debilitating conflict, and our influence plunges lower than it is today, Israel is going to be threatened. So I don't think it is a smarter strategic choice for them. I think they would probably prefer us to do it, but I just hope that not some of them conclude that maybe they could trigger us into doing that. That's the danger.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Back there, yes. And would you identify yourself, please?

Q: I'm Sam Lewis from the American Academy of Diplomacy. I was interested in the question what do the Iranians really want; it was raised earlier. And I was interested in the fact that nobody mentioned one thing that's often come up in talks with Iranians, that above all else, they want the security – the leadership wants the security of the revolution and some guarantees that it's secure against an American overthrow, but also recognition formally of their role in the region as a major dominant regional player. They look on themselves that way, but that's one of the things they've always talked about as something you'd never hear from us and they need to hear, in a credible fashion. What's your reaction to that?

GEN. SCOWCROFT: I thought I did say all that, except we're never going to recognize them as dominant in the region. We couldn't possibly do that. But I think yes, they seek recognition for them as a force in the region, one of the major forces of the region, as a major culture for the world; respect, absolutely. There's no question about that. And you know, they are a Shi'a branch of Islam in basically a Sunni region; they

are a Persian culture in an Arab region. And yeah, we need to recognize that yes, they need to have a security – a regional security framework in which they can flourish. And I think that's our fundamental task, but it's awful hard to get to there right now.

MR. IGNATIUS: I would just add that Sam, I put that question to their foreign minister, Mitaki (ph), in New York several weeks ago, describing this sort of broad discussion of our strategic interests, their strategic interests, recognition of their legitimate role as a rising power and security in the Gulf, their recognition of our red lines, as it were. This is an idea that's popular with a number of Iranians in the – (inaudible) – set; you know, they've talked for a long time about a – you could call it a Kissinger-style engagement or you could call it a Brzezinski-style or Scowcroft-style but, you know, a big, broad strategic discussion.

And to my surprise, he responded quite skeptically to that and he said, you know, yes, we could talk about – let's sit down and talk about anything under the sun but honestly, that would be a kind of taruf (ph) which, I've learned, is an Iranian expression which means just sort of making nice, you know. It's sort of saying nice things in this ritual of politeness that you don't really mean; you know, you say to a taxi driver how much, and he says oh, nothing, you know, it's free. And he doesn't mean it's free, he means, you know, name a price. And this would be a mistake and that it would be much wiser, said the foreign minister, to start with a limited agenda of items that we could make progress on. And if we could make progress on those items, then proceed from there. I thought it was a very interesting and, in some ways, you know, a contrarian view of this big question we've been talking about.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yes, right here.

Q: Hi, I'm – (off mike) – with the International City Management Association. My question is what, if any role, should human rights play in American foreign policy vis-à-vis in the course of these negotiations as well.

DR. BRZEZINSKI: Let me start. The negotiations are about a very specific subject, and that subject is important enough that it has to be addressed on its merits. Human rights is important, but human rights can affect the degree of originality, warmth, depth of mutual engagement, but cannot be the decisive factor in the negotiating process when other potentially really life-threatening issues are at stake. So yes, human rights enters into it, but only indirectly. And secondly, it cannot be unilateral demand. We have a concern for human rights, but many people in the world feel that human rights are not totally respected in the United States either. And either we all know the reasons for that, and they have a right to raise those issues, so it is also therefore a reciprocal issue.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Did you have a question?

Q: Humman Sehsan (ph), VOA Persian Service. One of the premise talking about our behavior and our action is if Iranian are acting rational or not. Looking at last

30 years, what kind of – how can we draw from the conclusion? Are they acting rational, or more ideological and not pragmatic?

GEN. SCOWCROFT: I think it depends who you're talking about. My sense is over the last 30 years, that the ruling mullahs are very careful, very cautious, not high risk-taking. But I think Ahmadinejad, for example, is much more provocative because it appeals to his constituency and heightens his support in the system by having us say nasty things about him; see, they're threatening us. So it's to his advantage and therefore, I think he is a much greater risk-taker, because of his position, than the rulers, than Khomeini is – by his, which is fundamentally the preservation of the system.

MR. BRZEZINSKI: The question posed is have the Iranians been acting rationally over the last 30 years. I'm sort of tempted to ask have we been acting rationally over the last seven years?

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right, I think we have time for one more question.

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yes.

Q: That was too many temptations in that one. Chris Nelson, with the Nelson Report. Thanks for a really great discussion.

Every sort of principle that you two gentlemen talked about today, the concerns, the bigger picture, you could take the word Iran out and put in North Korea and be right on almost every count. Secretary Rice is due to at least shake hands or be in a picture or something with the North Korean foreign minister tomorrow which, again, completes this parallel with Ambassador Perrins (sp) last weekend. What are your thoughts about how these two situations seem to be reinforcing each other and are the two governments involved, looking at how we're handling each of these cases? And where might this leave us, come January and a new president? Thank you.

GEN. SCOWCROFT: well, I think that's an interesting question and I won't jump into all aspects of it. But I think the parallels are uncanny because we started out with both, thinking the solution to the problem in both North Korea and Iran was regime change. And we have abandoned it in both cases. In the first case, we recognize that to work with China, North Korea regime change is anathema to them because they don't want chaos on their border. And the result has been now cooperation between China and the United States, and real progress where confrontation has resulted in them having X number of nuclear weapons or material for them. The same course we followed in Iran, except I think – I would guess, within the administration, there's been a lot of deadlock and there's been no – we've backed away from regime change, but not toward much of anything else. And I think one of the encouraging signs of Bill Burns going on this was a

movement in the way of going the way we went in North Korea. So that's all I would say about it.

DR. BRZEZINSKI: I would just add this: In the case of North Korea, the real turning point, in my judgment, came when the Chinese decided to become decisively engaged and when the Chinese decided that, in fact, it was in their interest to get a constructive resolution of that problem, and they've begun to apply themselves. And they were in a position to exercise quite a decisive influence in North Korea because any effective sanctions against North Korea would collapse if the Chinese were not involved. And if the Chinese were involved, then the North Koreans would have no recourse; they would really be totally isolated.

In the case of Iran the situation is somewhat more complex, but there are, as Brent correctly pointed out, significant analogies. And here too, I think the increasing engagement of China, since roughly the turn of the year, has been important because I think the Chinese have a view which is somewhat similar to the view that they came to entertain regarding North Korea, that this is an issue that ought to be resolved but that ought to be resolved without some major eruption. I think they are, in a sense, partnering de facto with the Germans, who have a similarly sort of rational and patient perspective in this issue, but neither of them has the same degree of leverage on Iran that China has had on North Korea.

The British, by and large, are still playing the same role that they played with Iran; that is to say, publicly with us. Maybe they whisper otherwise privately, but the public support is really what counts. The French are in between, which means that there isn't a decisive leverage. Could the Russians be that decisive? They could be, I think, as David mentioned earlier, because of their involvement in the Iranian nuclear program themselves. But then, they have the other interests in mind, including the ultimate realization that a downturn in this issue, for them, is not negative. It could be even beneficial. That doesn't mean that they want it, but it does introduce a complicating element into their calculations.

So that negotiating process lacks that decisive edge and we, I think, are still, for a variety of reasons, reluctant to decide which way really to go, for reasons that Brent mentioned. I think the administration is divided; it has little time left. There is still a great deal of emotional involvement on the part of the tough decision-makers in the idea that they ought to somehow resolve it before they leave office. And all of that complicates the picture in a way that doesn't induce the American approach to be as consistent and as eventually constructive as it gradually became in the North Korean case.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for coming. Gentlemen, thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Thank you for coming today to CSIS. I want to thank our trustees, Dr. Brzezinski and General Scowcroft.

(END)