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Not Just for Iraq, Says Middle East Expert: U.S. Needs a Bold Deal with Iran to Halt Nuclear Development and Stabilize the Region

Flynt Leverett Calls for Coherent New Approach in Century Foundation Report

New York City, December 6, 2006 —As the Iraq Study Group recommends direct and unconditional U.S. talks with Iran, Middle East expert Flynt Leverett argues in a new report for The Century Foundation that the United States needs to deal directly with Iran in order to prevent Iranian development of nuclear weapons and to resolve other political and security issues. Leverett warns that if the United States does not move quickly, it may soon be faced with managing the negative consequences of Iran's nuclearization.

In *Dealing with Tehran: Assessing U.S. Diplomatic Options toward Iran*, Leverett warns that any incremental, issue-by-issue or step-by-step approach to engagement with Iran will fail. Moreover, he says that America's current options to coerce Iran, either militarily or through sanctions, are strategically weak and could undermine important U.S. goals. Internal divisions within President Bush's administration, Leverett argues, have left it mired in a "strategically incoherent approach to diplomacy on the nuclear issue," preventing substantive progress toward a settlement. The U.S. needs a comprehensive and coherent approach.

In the report, Leverett evaluates and assesses prior attempts at engaging Iran, including the incentives package offered Iran by the Europeans in August 2005 and the package presented to Tehran by the Security Council's P-5 plus Germany in June 2006. He then offers a detailed framework for a "grand bargain" diplomatic engagement with Iran. The comprehensive strategy would address three issues:

- Iran's security interests, perceived threats, and a place in the regional and international order;
- U.S. security interests, including stopping what Washington sees as Iran's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and its support for terrorism;
- Developing a cooperative approach to regional security.

Leverett argues that, while it may not be politically popular, at the core of a U.S.-Iranian "grand bargain" there will need to be an American security guarantee to the Islamic Republic. He says that in exchange the United States would gain—among other benefits—strategically meaningful limits on Iran's nuclear activities, termination of its support for terrorism, and Iranian cooperation in stabilizing post-Saddam Iraq. Additionally, he believes a U.S.-Iranian rapprochement also could provide the foundation for establishing a regional security framework in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East more broadly.

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The Century Foundation conducts public policy research and analyses of economic, social, and foreign policy issues, including inequality, retirement security, election reform, media studies, homeland security, and international affairs. The foundation produces books, reports, and other publications, convenes task forces and working groups, and operates seven informational Web sites. With offices in New York City and Washington, D.C., The Century Foundation is nonprofit and nonpartisan and was founded in 1919 by Edward A. Filene.

Leverett warns that the window of opportunity for achieving a diplomatic breakthrough on the nuclear issue is closing because of Iran's progress in developing its fuel cycle capabilities, a perceived increase in Iran's regional standing and capacity to withstand international pressure. He says that if the administration does not move soon to pursue a broad-based strategic rapprochement with Tehran, it will eventually have to design a strategy to cope with managing the negative consequences of Iranian nuclearization.

Flynt Leverett is a senior fellow and director of the Geopolitics of Energy Initiative in the American Strategy Program at the New America Foundation. He is also a visiting professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Between 1992 and 2003, he had a distinguished career in government, serving as senior director for Middle East affairs at the National Security Council, Middle East expert on the secretary of state's Policy Planning Staff, and senior analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency. He is the author of *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire* (Brookings Institution Press, 2005), a study of politics and policymaking in Syria that also offers recommendations for U.S. policy toward this critical country. He has published numerous articles on Middle Eastern regional security, intelligence reform, and other issues and is a popular guest on broadcast news and talk programs.

Mr. Leverett can be reached directly at leverett@newamerica.net or 571/239-2205 for comment .

Dealing with Tehran: Assessing U.S. Diplomatic Options toward Iran is part of a series of reports commissioned by The Century Foundation to inform the policy debate about Iran-related issues. Other reports in the series include:

The End of the "Summer of Diplomacy": Assessing U.S. Military Options on Iran, by Sam Gardiner, Colonel, USAF (ret.)

Nuclear Armed Iran: A Difficult but Not Impossible Policy Problem, by Barry Posen, a Ford International Professor of Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Sanctions Against Iran: Key Issues, by Bruce Jentleson, Professor of Political Science and Public Policy Studies, Duke University (forthcoming)

Fundamentalists, Pragmatists, Mullahs, and Nukes: Iranian Politics and Nuclear Confrontation by Gareth Smyth, Tehran Bureau Chief, *Financial Times* (forthcoming)

The reports can be downloaded from The Century Foundation Web site at www.tcf.org. The authors are available for interviews. Contact Christy Hicks hicks@tcf.org or (212) 452-7723.

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