

Message on the Observance of Nowruz March 19, 2008

I send greetings to those celebrating Nowruz.

For the millions of people who trace their heritage to Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan, India, and Central Asia, Nowruz is a time to celebrate the New Year with the arrival of spring. This cherished and ancient festival brings together family and friends to reflect on what has come before and celebrate a season of new beginnings.

Our country is proud to be a land where individuals from many different cultures can pass their traditions on to future gen-

erations. The diversity of America brings joy to our citizens and strengthens our Nation during Nowruz and throughout the year.

Laura and I send our best wishes to all those celebrating Nowruz, both here in the United States and abroad. May the year ahead be filled with peace and many blessings.

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Interview With Setareh Derakhshesh of VOA Persian News Network March 19, 2008

Ms. Derakhshesh. Mr. President, let me thank you first on behalf of the Voice of America, on behalf of the Persian News Network for giving us your time. We really appreciate that, sir.

The President. Thank you.

Iran

Ms. Derakhshesh. As you know, Mr. President, this is the eve of Nowruz, the Iranian New Year. What is your message to the Iranian people as they face tough economic circumstances and infringement on their freedoms?

The President. Well, first, *Nowruz a tan Mubarak*. Secondly, that the people of the United States respects the people of Iran, that we respect the traditions of Iran, the great history of Iran. We have differences with the Government, but we honor the people. And we want the people to live in a free society. We believe freedom is a right for all people and that the freer the world is, the more peaceful the world is. And so my message is: Please don't be

discouraged by, you know, the slogans that say America doesn't like you, because we do, and we respect you.

Ms. Derakhshesh. What do you say to the regime, sir? What would you say to the regime?

The President. I'd say to the regime that they've made decisions that have made it very difficult for the people of Iran. In other words, the Iranian leaders, in their desire to, you know, enrich uranium, in spite of the fact that the international community has asked them not to, has isolated a great country. And that if—there's a way forward. I mean, the Iranian leaders know there's a way forward. And that is, verifiably suspend your enrichment, and you can have new relationships with people in the U.N. Security Council, for example.

And it's just sad that the leadership is in many ways very stubborn because the Iraqi—the Iranian people are not realizing their true rights. And they're confusing people in Iraq, as well, about their desires.

And you know, it's a tough period if—in history for the Iranian people, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Iran/Uranium Enrichment/Russia

Ms. Derakhshesh. On the nuclear issue, sir, is there a solution to the problem that would both satisfy the United States concern and, at the same time, allow Iran to proceed with nonmilitary nuclear energy research?

The President. Well, part of the problem is that it's very hard for people to trust the Iranian Government because they haven't told the full truth, and that's why the people of Iran have got to understand there's great suspicions right now, not only in the United States but around the world. But there is a better way forward. And I thought, for example, the Russians proposed an interesting way, that says—and I have said publicly, and the Iranian people need to know that I believe Iran has the right to have civilian nuclear power. I believe in civilian nuclear power. Iran is a sovereign country, and they should have it.

The problem is, we just don't trust the Government because they haven't been forthcoming about their enrichment of fuels to go into the reactor. And therefore, Russia's offer to provide fuel on a contractual basis and provide fuel on a consistent basis would help solve the problem. And that is, the Iranians wouldn't need to enrich; they would have fuel for their reactor; and the people would have cheaper electricity. And I support that idea.

Ms. Derakhshesh. Sir, would you allow enrichment inside Iran if there are guarantees and international supervision?

The President. I would have to be convinced that any secret programs, you know, would be disclosed. In other words, I—you know, once you—once a nation hasn't told the truth, it requires a lot of work to convince people that they'll be telling the truth in the future. And my problem is, is that the Iranian Government has not been forthcoming, has not fully disclosed

their programs like the IAEA asked them to. So there's a lot of distrust right now.

And the better way forward is for there to be a contractual, solid obligation to provide fuel for a nuclear reactor, and then the Iranians can have their civilian nuclear power.

Iran/U.S. Foreign Policy

Ms. Derakhshesh. At a time when Iranians are going through very difficult economic circumstances—there's high employment, high unemployment; there are high prices; there are unfilled promises—the United Nations Security Council just passed a new set of sanctions against the regime. Is the United States concerned, sir, that the regime might exploit these circumstances to whip up anti-American sentiments, and also to use those and misuse them?

The President. Sure. No, I appreciate that. Of course we are. We're always concerned about the individual. You know, I'm concerned about the mom trying to raise her child in a hopeful environment. And I'm concerned about a child wanting to gain the knowledge so that he or she can realize her God-given talents. And of course, we're worried about the human condition.

And any time a government is failing to meet the needs of the people—or a lot of times, not any time—but a lot of times governments have failed to meet the needs of their people, particularly in relatively nontransparent, nonfree societies, they always look for somebody to blame. And I'm not surprised that, you know, the leaders would blame the United States for the problems they, themselves, have created.

And so yes, I mean, it enters my mind. On the other hand, the people of Iran must understand that the conditions exist in large part because of either mismanagement by the Government or isolation because of the Government's decisions on foreign policy matters, such as announcing they want to destroy countries with a nuclear weapon.

I mean, it is irresponsible remarks like that which cause great credibility loss with the Iranian Government and the actions of which will—are affecting the country.

Progress in Iraq/Iran

Ms. Derakhshesh. Mr. President, if I may, I want to ask you about Iraq also. Today is the fifth anniversary of the start of the Iraq war, and you had a speech on the war on terror. Are you satisfied with the political situation in Iraq in view of the improving security situation? And also, has Iran played a role in this?

The President. I am pleased, but not satisfied. I am pleased because there's a modern Constitution in Iraq. I am pleased because people have voted in Iraq. I am pleased because there's, you know—they're heading toward Provincial elections in Iraq. I'm pleased to see democracy moving. I'm not satisfied because there's more work to be done.

One of the problems we do have in Iraq is the—there's been some negative Iranian influence, such as the exportation from Iran of certain weapons that have been used by extremists to murder and to kill people. And it's been particularly unhelpful.

Now, look, I understand Iraq and Iran are going to have relations. After all, they've got a long border. But from my perspective, Iran has not been helpful in terms of helping this young democracy survive. I would think it would be in Iran's interests to have a peaceful neighbor. They had been at war at one time with Iraq. I would believe that a peaceful Iraq would be in the long-term interests of the Iranian people. And yet it's hard to have a peaceful Iraq if there are elements inside the country that are trying to use violence and murder to continue to stir up sectarian doubts

and raise concerns which will cause more violence.

Iran-U.S. Relations/Iraq

Ms. Derakhshesh. There have been recent contacts between the United States and Iran over Iraq. Some dissidents inside Iran think that these might expand to other areas—

The President. Yes.

Ms. Derakhshesh. —and they feel that this will undercut their position and that would strengthen the regime's hand. What are your thoughts on that, sir?

The President. My thought is, is that the reformers inside Iran are brave people. They've got no better friend than George W. Bush, and I ask for God's blessings on them, on their very important work. And secondly, that I would do nothing to undermine their efforts. And thirdly, that the talks between Iran—between the U.S. and Iran about Iraq are solely about Iraq, and that the message to the Iranians is: Stop importing your weapons, your sophisticated IEDs, and—or there will be consequences inside of Iraq. And when we find people transporting weapons that are aimed to harm innocent people or to arm militias that are aiming to harm innocent people, then they will be brought to justice—that there's a better way to deal inside of Iraq than the Iranians are now dealing. And so this message is nothing more than limited to Iraq.

Ms. Derakhshesh. Mr. President, thank you very much. And thanks for allowing me to do the interview, sir.

The President. Thank you; yes, ma'am.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 1:11 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House and was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 20.

Interview With Parichehr Farzam of Radio Farda March 19, 2008

Nowruz/Iran

Ms. Farzam. Mr. President, thank you so much for your time in this interview with Radio Farda. On the beginning of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, what message do you wish to share with the people of Iran, especially with the Iranian women, as well as the young generation?

The President. First, that the United States of America wishes everybody a happy New Year. Secondly, that the United States—people of the United States respects the great Iranian history and culture. We have great respect for the people. And we've got problems with the Government. We have problems with the Government because the Government has been threatening, has made decisions that—and statements that really have isolated the people of Iran.

My message to the young in Iran is that someday your society will be free, and it will be a blessed time for you. My message to the women of Iran is that the women of America share your deep desire for children to be—to grow up in a hopeful society and to live in peace.

Iran/Freedom Agenda

Ms. Farzam. Speaking of women of Iran, Mr. President, the majority of population in Iran are women. And even in the Iranian culture they are considered the foundation on which men deeply rely. Is there any plan or could there be one to promote and engage the Iranian women in the U.S. to a unified and centralized movement for a free and democratic Iran?

The President. Well, I think the people of Iran are going to have to come to the conclusion that a free country is in their interest. We, of course, support freedom movements all around the world. We're supporting a freedom movement on the Iranian border in Iraq. We are promoting

and helping the Iraqis develop a free society. By the way, a free Iraq will help the Iranians see the blessings of a free society.

There's no doubt in my mind that the women will be leading freedom movements in Iran and elsewhere. And the role of the United States is to provide, you know, moral support without—and other support without undermining their cause.

Iraq/Iran

Ms. Farzam. Mr. President, in this fifth anniversary of the Iraq war, what impact do you think a peaceful solution on the Iranian nuclear crisis and a normalization of our relations with Iran would have on the security and political situation in Iraq and more generally in the whole Middle East?

The President. I think that success in Iraq will first of all depend upon the Iraqis' desire to reconcile their differences and to live in peace, and that's happening. It's hard work to overcome the—a dictatorship like Saddam Hussein's, but nevertheless, most Iraqis want to live in peace with their neighbor.

Secondly, a peaceful Iraq will depend upon making it clear to the Iranians to stop exporting weapons from Iran into Iraq—that arm militias and arm criminal gangs—that cause there to be harm for the innocent people.

Thirdly, it's very important for the neighborhood to understand that the United States is committed to peace and that we're not—that we won't be run out because of violence; that we believe that we're there for the right reason, which is to promote freedom and peace.

The free—you know, there's a chance that the U.S. and Iran can reconcile their differences, but the Government is going to have to make some—make different choices. And one is to verifiably suspend