

CDIA-15 Feb07-2

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen:

-speak today re Canada's role in the greater Middle East with a particular emphasis on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

-spent more than 5 years in the region as a Canadian Ambassador.
- soldier some 30 years earlier in the Gaza strip from 66 to 67
- witnessed the region in peace and war

-focus on three issues:

Canadian-Iranian relations; the Iranian challenge to the West/US; and how to address challenge.

-name Middle East country held spontaneous candlelight vigils in sympathy of the US and the West after 9/11.

-discussions on the ME touch in some way or another on the MEPP.
-state up front some Canadian- Middle East policy which I strongly endorse.
1. Israel is a sovereign state in fact and in law. It does not need anyone's permission to exist. It has the right to ensure its own security.
2. The Palestinian people have a right to self determination. A sovereign independent and viable Palestinian state should be part of a comprehensive, lasting, and just peace settlement.

Canadian-Iranian Relations.

-relations date from 1955. A Canadian diplomatic mission established in Tehran in 1959 and raised to Embassy status in 1961.

-visit by the Russian Amb to the Embassy when in Tehran in 2001.

-commented favourably on the row of photographs of Canadian Ambs who had served in Iran.

-noted that no wall long enough in Rus Emb.

-Russian Iran diplomatic relations went back more than 300 years.

-but influence and leverage can depend on more than just seniority.

-January 1980, Canadian Embassy in Tehran was closed.

-80 to 88 Canada and Iran did not maintain normal diplomatic relations.

-normal relations returned in 88.

-Canada concern about the GOI's opposition to the MEPP, support of terrorism and record on nuclear non-proliferation.

-Canada also has serious concerns about the HR situation in Iran. UNSCR 1737 of 23 Dec 06.

-since 1996 political relations with Iran governed by a policy of "controlled engagement".

-Canada places limits on contacts with Iran.

-death in July 03 of Canadian- Iranian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi; relations with Iran deteriorated.

-May 05 the Foreign Minister further tightened engagement policy now limited to:

1. The case of Mme Kazemi
- 2 Human rights
- 3 Iran's nuclear program.

-domestic situation in Iran has significantly deteriorated.

-now a hard line conservative majority in power.

-conservatives consolidated power in June 05 with the election of President Mahmoud Ahamadinejad.

-main platform was improving the economic situation for Iranians.

-Iranian economy continues to deteriorate and inflation increases.

-current sanctions having a serious impact.

-to deter criticism of abysmal economic performance (by young under 30; close to 50 million of the 70 million population) Amadinejad focus population on nationalistic issues.

-eg: Iranian nuclear program or the external threat (including Israel and the US).

-not know Ahamadinejad

-numerous encounters with predecessor, President Mohammad Khatami

-recall witnessing exchange between him and some young Iranians discussing women's rights.

- question from one young lady: "Mr. President who has the last word in your house? –You or your wife?"

-response from President: "I do of course. My wife says Mohammad I want you to do this and that and I reply - yes dear, of course dear"

-29 Nov 06, Iranian MPs opened an enquiry on 'activities of espionage by the Canadian Embassy in Tehran'.

-further announced if the accusations proven then the Majelis/Parliament will demand the closure of the Embassy.

-MPs have called the Embassy "a Den of Spies"; a term reserved especially for the former US Embassy closed in '79.

-overall relationship downhill since my departure.

-major conflict has emerged in the ME since 2003 that radically changed the regional context for western policy formulation.

-Shiite-Sunni sectarian violence. Shiites and Sunnis represent the oldest and most important sectarian divide in Islam.

- Shiites a minority of about 15% of the Muslim world, but account for about 90% of Iranians, 65% of Iraqis and 40% of Lebanese.

-outside Iran the Shiites never enjoyed being in power.

Iranian Challenges

- attempting to influence Iranian behaviour poses important challenges to the international community; particularly the USA.

- main challenge extends beyond the nuclear issue and the threat to Israel.

- whether to engage Iran to influence the course of its development or contain Iran

- Baker/Hamilton 'Iraq Study Group Report' suggested engagement important.

- engagement success may translate into success in dealing with the nuclear issue and other concerns.

- US policy could be gravitating towards confrontation with Iran

- US policy focused on Iran rather than Iraq will escalate conflict.

- if Iran attacked, expected that Iran would retaliate

- the quest for Democracy has dominated Iranian imagination.

- *walking the streets of Tehran, Isfahan or Shiraz.*

-*young people approach re impressions about Iran and its future relations with the west.*

- while the regime in Iran might be anti western the overall population is not. This is the exact opposite to most other countries in the region.

- US and Western concerns with Iranian ambition and policies must be addressed.

engagement could provide a path to influencing Iran's behaviour.

- engagement is not likely to quickly yield what the West wants.

- Middle East policy focusing only on containment or confrontation with Iran is problematic.

- de-escalate tensions in the region; for example the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Iraq.

- not tie all conflicts to the challenge of Iranian power

- conflict with Iran not solution to the challenges facing the Palestinian issue, Lebanon, and Iraq.
- importance of productive US-Iran relations in the ME.
- engagement of paramount importance.

A Canadian role

- Canada can make a difference in the ME.
 - Canada has no colonial baggage.
 - foreign minister McKay's recent visit to the ME;
 - personal experience that Canada has genuine credibility and influence in the area.
 - Canada along with many other nations share concern re the current regime in Iran.
 - Canada must work closely with friends and partners.
 - productively use 300,000 Iranian Canadians who understand the language, culture and values of both countries.
 - engagement is key.
 - adjust the current Canadian "controlled engagement" policy (not export controls).
 - *Not now being directly on the Foreign Affairs payroll at liberty to try and nudge policy in a slightly different direction from time to time.*
 - all non military options to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons must be widely and creatively explored.
 - Canadian interests should lie in re-energizing contacts with the Muslim and Arab world.
 - use modest but respected leverage to advise Iran that political normalization possible if stops seeking nuclear weapons and supporting terrorist groups.
- sensible, balanced and fresh approaches are needed.

Appreciate interest and attention.