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Background Briefing

Office of the Spokesman

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Two Senior Administration Officials On U.S. Support for Democracy in Iran

(12:10 p.m. EST)

MR. ERELI: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to today's background briefing on the Administration's request for funds to support democracy in Iran. We have two Senior Administration Officials briefing today. We'll begin with Senior Administration Official Number One, who has to leave in about 20 minutes, so Senior Administration Official Number One will give a couple remarks, move to your questions. I'd ask just in the interest of time that you keep questions short. And without further ado --

QUESTION: Wait a minute, Adam. Very quickly, could this be on the record?

MR. ERELI: It's on background.

QUESTION: Why?

MR. ERELI: The Secretary has testified and appeared on the record. She will be the on-the-record official today. Other officials will be on background.

QUESTION: Can the record show that a lot of us have requested for this to be on the record?

MR. ERELI: We'll let the record show.

QUESTION: I mean, this is not any low-level official. This is an official with authority and not a shy one either, so we would appreciate -- (laughter). We would appreciate some quotable remarks. We can make minimum use of anonymous quotes.

MR. ERELI: We'll continue to visit this after the briefing. Thanks.

QUESTION: Let the democracy in Iran be on the record.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Let me just say that I learned a long time ago, always listen to the State Department spokesmen. They're always right. (Laughter.) And I'll be happy to talk about the Red Sox on the record.

I'm going to be very brief, because I know you have seen what Secretary Rice said this morning to the Foreign Relations Committee and I think you all have a copy of the fact sheet that we issued this morning. But let me just provide, say, three things before I turn it over to my colleague to also make some remarks.

What the Secretary was doing this morning was to assert a sense of our overall strategy in Iran and to assert the point that Iran is a major strategic threat not just to the United States but to the Middle East region, but also to the international community, and in three specific respects.

First, is the story you all know very well, which is the continued attempts of the Iranian Government to achieve a nuclear weapons capability. This week's step to engage in centrifuge research and to admit that to the IAEA crosses a fundamental international red line and will further, in our view, deepen the isolation of the Iranian Government and I think make the verdict of a March 6th IAEA Board of Governors meeting quite certain that Iran will have been in violation of its obligations. And so we see this issue moving to the Security Council quite directly after March 6th.

Secondly, that Iran is engaged now in a series of actions in its own region that are disturbing not just to us but to many of the Arab states which are its neighbors, and also to some of the larger countries with which we have been talking over the last several months -- Russia and China, and India and others. But to see the Iranian President go to Damascus and have a summit meeting with leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas as well as the leaders of Syria was obviously quite disturbing. And to look at Iranian actions in Iraq, in Lebanon, and potential Iranian actions in the Palestinian territories, there is a disturbing trend of Iran and Iranian diplomatic and perhaps security and terrorism offensive which has been very disturbing for all of us to see. Iran does, as John Negroponte said in his testimony last week, does continue to be the leading sponsor and funder of terrorism in the Middle East and of the major terrorist groups in the Middle East.

And third, there is also the issue of the democracy deficit in Iran. And what Secretary Rice did this morning was attempt, on the part of the United States, to address that deficit in asking Congress for \$75 million in funding for this fiscal year, and this will be via a supplemental request that the Administration is making to Congress for money designed to expand our ability through Farsi language TV and Radio Farda to increase the ability of the United States Government to broadcast into Iran and to facilitate those in our private sector -- and there are many people in this country who are in this business who also wish to broadcast either radio or TV into Iran. That's the first part of the supplemental request, which you see in the fact sheet before you.

We also want to reach out to those that are in the democracy groups that are existent, and to nongovernmental organizations around the region who want to see democracy develop in Iran. And we want to have a series of exchanges with the Iranian people and thus the wish to see scholarships promoted and exchanges with professionals in Iran promoted itself.

So that is largely what she tried to define this morning. In terms of active diplomacy, you know the Secretary in her upcoming visit to the Middle East, she said this morning in her testimony, would be reaching out to several of the states in the Middle East to begin -- I should say continue -- our dialogue with them on the nature of the Iranian regime and what all of us must do to make sure that these Iranian policies are not taking root.

We have had a very active discussion with the Russians, with the Chinese, with the Indians, over the last several weeks. We'll continue that next week at a G-8 meeting in Moscow, where I'll be having specific discussions on the full range of concerns that we have with Iran. I'll be having those discussions with all the G-8 partners, and we do anticipate a NATO meeting in the future at the level of political directors, probably in the month of -- the latter part of March or early April, focused on Iran itself.

So I will conclude by saying the concerns that Secretary Rice expressed this morning are not solely American concerns. What we are hearing in all of our conversations with some of the major countries that voted against Iran at the IAEA two weeks ago, as well as especially with the Arab countries in the Middle East, is acute concern with the nuclear policies, the support for terrorism, the more aggressive foreign policy of the Government of Iran, as well as concerning the democracy deficit itself within Iran.

And I think there is a growing international consensus, if you will, that the nature of this current regime of President Ahmadi-Nejad is radical and that the statements that he's made, as Secretary Rice said this morning, are toxic statements and that there's a deepening isolation of Iran itself. And if Iran wanted to respond to the IAEA vote of two weeks ago in a way that would relieve their isolation, then I think that what they would have done is they would have reached out to support the Russian proposal that has been on the table since October, they would have made some kind of attempt to indicate an interest in discussions with the Europeans or the Russians, but they did the reverse. They postponed a February 16th meeting in Moscow. They said they were not interested in the Russian proposal because they insist on their right to enrich uranium in Iran rather than have the sensitive aspects of the fuel cycle take place outside of Iran. So I think the sum total of Iranian actions since the IAEA vote has been to further isolate themselves and to further embolden those in the international community -- and it's a lot of countries -- who now want to have a discussion about terrorism, the nuclear issue, as well as the democracy deficit.

QUESTION: Question. Could you elaborate a little bit -- ?

QUESTION: Very quickly. The Secretary talking about the Russian enrichment offer, said a couple of words suggesting it isn't perfect. You know, we support it, but she had some reservations. I don't know what her words were, but they suggested there were things about it that they wish were different. Do you have any idea what it is about the Russian proposal the United States finds a little bit inadequate?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Well, let me say first from a procedural point of view, my colleague here has done a lot of work on the package that was announced today, so when I leave the podium [Senior Administration Official Two] will be very happy to come up and answer questions on that. But I --

QUESTION: It's a bit esoteric but --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: No, it's not. I'll be happy to answer your question. Remember back

when President Bush was on his trip to Asia in November and he said publicly that we would find such a proposal attractive, the Russian proposal, and Secretary Rice has said that. Now, what we haven't been able to do --because the Iranians have not joined the negotiations at all -- we haven't been able to look at all the details of the Russian proposal. So I think it's fair to say, you know, we can't say that we would agree with every last detail. But do we agree with the thrust of the Russian proposal? Of course. And the Secretary and the President have both said that.

What is the Russian proposal, broadly defined? The Russians believe, and they have said very consistently now for four or five months, that while Iran has a -- the Russians say that Iran has the right to peaceful nuclear power, Iran should not have the sensitive aspects of the fuel cycle take place in Iran; therefore, the Russians proposed a type of offshore fuel supply arrangement that could be done by the Russians or any other number of countries.

What Dr. Larijani has done consistently over the last few weeks is to say, well, we're interested in talking about the Russian proposal but only if, only if, these sensitive fuel cycle activities take place on the territory of Iran, which is a fundamental contradiction to the Russian proposal. So it seems to us that what you're seeing is that Iran is engaged in a little bit of sophistry here; they want to say they're interested in negotiations but they actually deny the basis of the Russian proposal. And that has got a lot of people concerned in the international community. It's been very revealing to see this side of the Iranian position.

MR. ERELI: Peter.

QUESTION: The Secretary basically announced that she was going to the Gulf next week. I was wondering if you could give us some details of that and say what she -- she announced during her testimony.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: She did.

QUESTION: Can you give us some details of that and what she expects to come back with? You said it's going to focus on Iran.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I'm sure that Sean and Adam will give you at the right time the itinerary and where the Secretary is going. I don't think it's for me to announce that. But obviously she's going to the region next week. She has a lot to discuss with the leadership of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, some of the other countries, the events in Lebanon, the events in the Palestinian territories with Hamas, our larger goals region-wide to promote democracy, but specifically also this question of Iran.

And what's been interesting about the international debate on Iran is how focused it's been on the nuclear issue, really for the last two years, and so by definition a lot of our diplomacy has been focused on the EU-3 countries, on Russia, China, India. What the Secretary would like to do is broaden that international discussion and discuss with the Arab countries, who obviously have a lot of concerns about Iran, not just the nuclear issue but the terrorism issue, the more aggressive Iranian foreign policy in the region as well as the democracy deficit. And in fact, when we have our discussions at the G-8 in Moscow next week, certainly what we will put on the table is that broader notion of concerns about Iran. And so I think you'll see us do that in two respects next week, in the Middle East directly through the Secretary and in Moscow at the G-8 meeting.

QUESTION: This is the question that your successor on the podium could answer as well, but what are the prospects for actually achieving some kind of regime change in Tehran as a result of this? Is it going to take many years or will there be immediate effects of this kind of thing? And what -- I'll just leave it at that. Thanks.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I think you could get a sense from what the Secretary said this morning and what she has been saying and a number of us have been saying for many months now is that we -- it's very important that the international community grasp how much has changed in Tehran since the election of President Ahmadi-Nejad. It's not just the offensive rhetoric. It's also the nature of the policies, the complete rejection of the nuclear talks with the EU-3 and with Russia, and now the steps this week that the IAEA has confirmed on centrifuge research, in essence, the beginning of enrichment, the bright red line that shouldn't be crossed.

It's now also to see what President Ahmadi-Nejad and his associates have said on the issue of Hamas, and on the issue of Syria, and of Hezbollah. And so we are focused on gathering together as much of the international community as we can to appreciate the various permutations of Iranian policy broadly defined, and the Secretary believes that we are on a diplomatic track and that is what she has said consistently for many months now. But that diplomatic track has to be hard-headed. I mean, countries have to -- we would hope that countries that have normal relations with Iran would reflect on those relations, and use the instruments at their disposal in terms of normal economic and trade relations to begin to think what they can do to push back against what has been a radical series of proposals out of the Government of Iran since August 4th.

QUESTION: I'm sorry. Maybe my question wasn't clear. I wanted to know, aren't you trying to change the nature of the regime and the system in Iran by supporting these programs in much the way that you're supporting programs in other countries? Can you just address that and not the desire to change the policies of the current regime? Aren't these measures that you're announcing today an attempt to make systemic changes in Iran itself, and how would that come about?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Of course we wish to see the policies of the Iranian Government change because they are objectionable in the three areas that I mentioned. In addition to that, in asking Congress for \$75 million for money this year via the supplemental, we very definitely are asserting the view that we would like to see those in Iran who support democracy and who support a civil society, we'd like to see those people strengthened. And now obviously we'll have to take great care in how we spend this money and how any programs associated with this money are implemented, but there are lots of things that we can do to signal support for a future of democracy and freedom in Iran. And that is very definitely a goal that I think we share with many countries that want to see a rather autocratic government, wants to see that government's influence on its own people reduced. When journalists are thrown in jail, tortured and killed, as has happened, and when democracy advocates are stymied, as has happened, obviously we want to do what we can to show support for them. And by extending support to our broadcasting authorities, by increasing the scholarships and exchanges, that is one way to do that, and that's, as you see from the fact sheet, that's part of the purpose of this supplemental request.

I hope that answers your question, Steve.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) my question. One, not only this man is radical compared to the past regime in Iran, but after the IAEA vote he ordered the IAEA inspectors to come and remove the seals and go ahead with the programs and don't care about international community and the role of the UN. And second part, as far as supporting democracy in Iran

is concerned, millions are dying for democracy they want in Iran and thousands have been demonstrating here and around the world, but how are you going to support them only through this radio program, or beyond radio?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I think that the way the Secretary looks at it is that the request to Congress today is a down payment on actions that we would like to see the United States as a society and as our government take to indicate support for democracy in Iran. Obviously there are limitations on what the United States can do. We have not had diplomatic relations with Iran for 26 years. We do not have American embassies and consulates in Iran. We do not have an open official relationship with the Government of Iran. So what we can do is show support for those in Iranian society -- and there are many, including many of them who wish to see a different type of Iran, who wish to see further democracy and freedoms both for the press as well as for political figures as well as for individual citizens, and our programs are designed to do that.

Now, the United States is not acting alone in the world. In every respect, our Iran policy over the last year has been to build -- to work multilaterally and to build international coalitions. So we've been very faithful to the IAEA and that process. We now want to see the action shift towards the UN Security Council after March 6th. We want NATO to have a debate about Iran. And what we are doing here is what other countries are currently doing. The European Union at 25 countries with full diplomatic relations, and those countries are engaged in some of these activities. So these are consistent with the activities of many of our partners. We had a chance to brief our European allies on this program and I think it's fully consistent -- and by the way, in some of the phone calls we had with them, very enthusiastically received by the European countries -- fully consistent with what they and other democratic countries are doing.

QUESTION: You said earlier, if I heard you right, that there was acute concern in the international community on the three points you made: the nuclear issue, terrorism, and on the democracy deficit. Is there acute concern in the international community on the democracy deficit outside of Washington?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I think there is, Charlie. You know, one of the -- I have had the opportunity for 11 months now to have very extended conversations with all of our allies, with the Russians, the Brazilians, the Egyptians, the Chinese, the Indians; and the concern that's been right in front of the international community has been the nuclear issue, but by no means is that the limit of concern.

Now, obviously, no two governments have identical views and you hear different views all the time, but I think there is increasing concern about the terrorism issue and about the democracy deficit. You've seen the European Union, Canada, speak out publicly about some of the actions of the Iranian Government towards its own people.

MR. ERELI: One more. We've got time for one more with [Senior Administration Official One]. Glenn.

QUESTION: Yes. You mentioned that the UN Security Council will take up the issue of the nuclear program in March, but by all accounts that's going to be a very long and deliberative process and it sounds like with this -- all these meetings that you're having, are you trying to create your own kind of coalition of the willing to deal with Iran right now, to possibly bring up reductions in economic ties, steps that individual countries can do now in a coordinated fashion before you actually accomplish those things at the Security Council?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Glenn, I think you are right to suggest that we need to work on a number

of fronts, and that's how we see the development of international attention to Iran. There's the specific focus of the IAEA and soon the UN Security Council on the nuclear issue. There's no question that in our relationship with the European Union and in NATO with the European partners we need to talk about and have a broader perspective on the terrorism and democracy issues, not just the nuclear. And there's also no question that we want to work multilaterally; whether it's with the EU, with NATO, with the United Nations, there has to be a broad front in countering a regime that is posing so many challenges to the rest of the world.

Now, I don't assert here that somehow there's some perfectly formed international coalition with some compact of identical views. That doesn't exist. But it's been interesting to see, and I would just suggest: take the perspective of the last year, just a snapshot of the last year. A year ago today, if I were briefing, I'd be briefing about a narrow window of three European countries negotiating a nuclear issue with Iran. What happened? We were able to expand that focus to include Russia, China, India, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Egypt, all of whom voted against Iran at the IAEA just two weeks ago. That coalition was not in place a year ago today.

I think there's also been, particularly since the inauguration of Ahmadi-Nejad, acute concern about Iran's policy in its own region. And that has evolved over the last six months, but we not only sense it, we hear about it in our discussions with the Arab governments of the region.

And last, on the democracy front, I think the concern is already -- always been there, but perhaps is more pronounced now. So, I don't want to exaggerate that somehow, there has been the construction of a coalition, as you assert, that is perfectly aligned. You're going to hear lots of different voices in the debate about Iran, and some will be more concerned with one issue over the other. But there is emerging -- and it's clear to see there is emerging a sense of broad-based international concern about this government.

MR. ERELI: We'll do one more with Saul.

QUESTION: What is it that you want the Arab countries in the region to do with Iran? Just talk to them and pressure them or would you like them to reassess their ties, have their own form of sanctions?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Well, it's not for us to suggest publicly what other governments should do. And we have had a good discussion with a number of these governments already and Secretary Rice will continue that next week. I think for the Arab governments, in particular, and for other governments in the Middle East region, it's Iranian -- if you think of it, what most of the democratic community is trying to do in the Middle East is assert support for an independent Lebanon, support for a future of peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis and support for a unified, democratic, and stable Iraq.

What is Iran doing in all three of those questions? Well, the President of Iran went to Beirut and met with a rejectionist front, Assad and the heads of Hamas and Hezbollah, and I think the Palestinian -- PFLP General Command, if I'm not mistaken. So, he met with a group of people who want to tear apart Lebanon or continue Syrian influence and he met with the terrorist groups that have been focused on Lebanon and killing people in Lebanon and in the Palestinian territories and in Israel. And what is Iran doing in Iraq, but to assert the politics of division, not the politics of unity, which is what our country stands for in Iraq.

So, when most of the democratic world on Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Israel, and Iraq is asserting that we need to have policies designed to support a positive evolution of affairs, Iran seems to be trying to build a group that is designed to continue terrorism and to continue to divide people. I think it's that fact that has emerged through the Iranian Government's actions and statements that has a lot of people concerned.

MR. ERELI: Thanks very much and we'll welcome our second briefer. I don't know if you want to open with anything.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yeah. I just wanted to sort of summarize the different pieces of the package we put together to promote democracy and to expand our ability to get our message out to the Iranian people. The first is the money that we have had allocated in the Fiscal Year '05 budget, which is \$3.5 million for which we've already begun working both with American NGOs and universities on projects to help labor unionists organize, on projects to put together networks of dissidents and human rights activists.

Also, we have a project under way that helps to catalog human rights violations of the Iranian regime. We're beginning working with our own political party institutes here in the U.S. to help to organize and build networks among those people inside Iran who are trying to work for freedom.

Secondly, as the Secretary mentioned this morning, we have \$10 million that we've been appropriated in Fiscal Year '06, and we anticipate within the next 10 days to two weeks, you'll see requests for proposals out on the street soliciting applications and proposals for those funds which will also be dedicated towards the same kinds of activities in terms of helping to promote civil society development, working not just with American NGOs, but also with international NGOs, working with people inside and outside of Iran, looking for ways that we can bring Iranians out for training purposes, as well as for educational exchange activities.

The Secretary then announced this morning our supplemental request for '06. You've got some details in the information sheet we handed out. This breaks down, really, into four main categories. The first is broadcasting to the Iranian people. Our sense is that the Iranian people themselves -- I think it's actually very clear, the Iranian people themselves desire to live in freedom. They desire to live in democracy. They desire a different system. And the President has been clear in saying that we stand with them. We believe they deserve better than to be represented by a terrorist, repressive regime, which is the one they currently have to live under.

Broadcasting is critical. I think you're seeing a real explosion inside Iran of a whole range of technologies, both in terms of the basic satellite dishes for television, as well as looking at things like potentially satellite radio broadcasts. We'll be looking at expanding some of our existing tools. We currently have, through the Voice of America, for example, a Persian language television service. It only operates -- Farsi language, sorry. It only operates six hours out of 24 every day, so we'll be looking at ways that we can expand those broadcasts.

But we'll also be looking at brand-new, innovative things we will be doing directly, in terms of helping to develop programming, looking at ways that we can work through the internet, looking at things like instant messaging, sort of the whole range of new communications that have been developed in the last several years. We will also be adding \$15 million to the, sort of, more traditional democracy promotion activities that will build on the kinds of things I mentioned a moment ago.

We think it's critically important that we also expand our reach to Iranian students and to the Iranian young people. And we want to find ways that we can offer more scholarships to them, offer more fellowships for exchanges between American academics and Iranian academics, ways that we really can help to deepen our ties. I think on both sides, the Iranian people and the American people have a real desire to deepen and expand those ties and we want to have the resources that will allow us to do that.

Finally, in order to be able to move in this way, because of the sanctions that currently exist on the Government of Iran, we will have to get licenses. Now, there is already a process in place. Any NGO that wants to do work inside of Iran, any business that wants to operate inside of Iran has to apply to the Treasury Department to get what's called an OFAC license. We have agreed, in a very innovative approach with the Department of Treasury, that we here at the Department of State, in the Near East Bureau and in the Democracy Bureau will be granted umbrella licenses so that we can work directly with NGOs and fund their activities inside of Iran in a way that we have not been able to legally in the past.

We're going through the process right now of putting procedures in place that will allow us to vet those NGOs, to vet the people that we're working with, obviously, very carefully. But I think it's a real sign of the Administration's commitment to and dedication to these democracy promotion efforts that we are looking for ways that we can move quickly and help to remove some of the obstacles that have existed before. So, let me stop there and answer questions.

MR. ERELI: Let's go to Barry.

QUESTION: Can I ask you just to clarify a little bit, the broadcasting?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: You made reference to VOA, six hours a day, et cetera. Are you going to establish -- first of all, do you broadcast -- reference to VOA, in part -- do you broadcast now in Farsi? Are you establishing a seven-day-a-week, 24-hour-a-day sort of a CNN or a CBS for Iran entirely in Farsi, where all the broadcasts -- I don't want to use the word, propaganda, but all -- your informational broadcasts, if you want to call it that, be all in Farsi? It's not clear to me what you got now and what you plan to do, actually.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Right. We have a series of tools now, both television and radio, which are in Farsi. I think the most well-known of those are Radio Farda, which is a joint effort between Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, and the Voice of America, and our VOA service, which is television, which is primarily -- which is in Farsi. But they have a 24-hour-a-day capability, but they only have programming that covers six hours a day.

So, clearly, one of the things that we will be doing is developing additional programming to put on VOA so that we can help to expand what their capabilities are.

QUESTION: Well, are you going to turn the VOA limited telecasting now to a 24-hour-a-day service? Is that simply it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: That is our hope. Now, I don't want to speak for the Broadcasting Board of Governors. We'll be working with them, but we do think that it would be much more useful if the VOA was

broadcasting around the clock, not just for a limited period of time. That's not the only thing we're going to do, though. And I think one of the critical new pieces to this is looking for other outlets; not just using our existing outlets, but looking at whether it makes sense to establish new stations, whether it makes sense to purchase programming, for example, from existing stations, whether it makes sense to buy time on existing stations. But we really want to significantly expand -- you know, our penetration and our reach in getting information into the Iranian people. So, it'll be both through existing efforts and also new channels.

MR. ERELI: Elise.

QUESTION: Could you talk about -- a little bit about what you see in terms of the landscape, civil society, and the opposition to the Iranian regime? How are you going to combat the strength and obviously, the autocratic power of the regime in terms of advancing these goals? I mean, obviously, the regime is going to stomp all over them if they try to rise up and --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: The Iranian regime is one of the most repressive and autocratic in the world, clearly a state sponsor of terror, imprisons people and executes them for trying to exercise their free will. And we're very aware of that, and the -- one of the key things that we're focused on is, we don't want to hurt the people we're trying to help. We understand very well that people that we begin to work with will become targets and so, I think that you will see us not being as public as we might otherwise be about specific individuals we're working with.

One of the challenges also, frankly, is that inside Iran today, I think you would be hard-pressed to find a real NGO. NGOs and civil society organizations, for the most part, inside Iran are penetrated by the government and we are well aware of that. And the challenge is to help to organize other networks and help to take some of the extremely brave people who are risking their lives to speak out against the regime and who are standing up to the regime and help to give them the tools to organize themselves and to form new groups that are not infiltrated by the government that we can work with.

We don't underestimate the challenges. The challenges are significant because of the nature of this regime, but it's also critically important to our own national security that -- and it's the right thing to do to help to support the people who are fighting for their freedom in Iran.

MR. ERELI: Peter.

QUESTION: Just two things. One is that I spoke to the Broadcasting Board of Governors. They say that VOA Persian is broadcasting one hour a day and trying to go to four. I don't know how that reconciles.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Well, my -- I'll double-check that. My information is that they're six hours a day, but --

QUESTION: My question is -- is, in terms of the money, you have 75 million that covers the broadcasting and the civil society. Can you give us the equivalent that that's already in the budget for 2006 to see how much of an increase we're looking at (inaudible)?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yeah, I have to check for you on the broadcasting number for '06, because

I don't know that. For the democracy number for '06, it's at least --[USD] 10 million, I think, is the language there. So, they've given us the authority to spend, you know, 10 million or above. So, this will give us additional new funding, both for broadcasting and democracy, but I don't, off the top of my head, have the broadcasting number for '06.

QUESTION: Could you get that so we can compare (inaudible)?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yeah, we can get you that.

MR. ERELI: Teri.

QUESTION: You say that the -- one of the underlying beliefs here is that the Iranian people deserve better than this regime, but -- and we bring this up all the time. The fact is they elected Ahmadi-Nejad and polls inside the country show that they definitely couch the whole nuclear issue in terms of their right to have nuclear power and sort of -- that all ties in with the U.S. push with Iran as a threat. And how are you going to counter that? I mean, when you say they deserve better, isn't that going to offend people who elected him?

And also, when you say that you want to do more exchanges and bring more people out and get more people in, when the government knows -- hears you announcing these things, they're not going to give them visas, are they? I mean, how are you going to -- how are you going to bring people out?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Let me start first on the issue of the legitimacy of the regime. I think that you all know the extent to which candidates were forbidden from running. I think the number is close to a thousand candidates were actually cut out of the race, were not able to run. I think there is a real question about the -- about whether or not Ahmadi-Nejad's election was, in fact, legitimate. I think there is no way to tell.

I think one has to be highly suspicious, given the nature of that regime, given the lack of people's ability to actually campaign, given the lack of people's ability to express their free will. So, I would be hesitant to put too much into what Ahmadi-Nejad himself, or the regime, would call his election. I'm not sure that I would characterize it that way.

In terms of the nuclear issue, we've been very clear in saying that no one is trying -- and the Secretary, I believe, said this morning -- nobody is trying to deny the Iranian people access to nuclear energy, access to nuclear power, but what they cannot have is a nuclear weapon. And I think that what you see very clearly, frankly, among the Iranian people is a real sense, in many of the polls that I have seen, for example, that they are concerned that the resources that the government has diverted into their nuclear program are resources that are not being spent on health care, not being spent on education, not being spent on the very kinds of things Ahmadi-Nejad promised during his own election campaign.

I think they also -- you know, the Iranian culture and the Iranian people -- it's an incredibly important and proud and historic -- you know, tradition of thousands of years where -- you know, they have been respected around the world and now they find themselves pariahs. They find it impossible to travel to many countries. They find themselves increasingly isolated, and I think that that's also making them very uncomfortable. And I think that Ahmadi-Nejad's rhetoric, you know, has blowback, because people -- the people inside the country -- I think, certainly, the young people -- nobody wants to live in a pariah state and nobody wants to feel that they are represented by somebody on the world stage who is, in fact,

a terrorist and a pariah.

And so, I think that -- you know, we have been very clear about saying, sort of, what is and what isn't acceptable here and -- you know, I do believe that there is extensive desire among the Iranian people, as there is among every people -- you know, for the ability to live in freedom.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yeah, in terms of exchanges, again, one of the OFAC licenses we're getting will be for the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. There will be two licenses. One covers democracy and one covers education and exchanges. And it will be a challenge, but frankly, part of what we want to do is push the envelope here. You know, I think that it is absolutely clear that the Iranian people -- many of them, probably -- you know, a very significant number of them would like to be able to travel, would like to be able to come to the United States. And I think that we want to be in a position where we're making that offer and we're making it possible for them to do that.

And if the Iranian Government steps in and says no, then I think it will be yet one more piece of evidence of -- you know, the nature of this regime and the fact -- the extent to which they're cutting their own people off from the rest of the world.

MR. ERELI: A few other questions from --

QUESTION: Let me give you (inaudible) view. I'm an Iranian journalist working with BBC Persian Service. When Secretary Rice speaks at the Congress and gives the specifications that things are going to be more harder in Iran, there are going to be more crackdowns on dissidents and activists, and the union people, they're going to label all reformists -- or people are working for democracy as collaborators with the U.S. Government. Don't you think that there will be a more sophisticated and better way to approach this issue?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: You know, we hear exactly the opposite, that -- you know, certainly, the regime will feel threatened, and I suspect that there will be some crackdowns but I also know from discussions with dissidents inside Iran and with those who have come out that they need our help and our local support. And that knowing that the United States is on their side also gives certain dissidents -- you know, a level of protection against the regime. So, I would be hesitant to sort of assert, in a blanket way, that public statements hurt.

I do think, as I said in the beginning, that we will be very careful about sort of saying, "We are working with this individual," or "We are working with this group," because we don't want to encourage crackdowns on them. But I disagree with your characterization that as a general matter, America's public statements, whether it's the President or the Secretary of State talking about our support for the Iranian people and being specific about what we're going to do, I think that can actually arm people and help them in their own fight for freedom.

QUESTION: I had one other question, sorry.

MR. ERELI: I'm sorry; we've got to move on. Carol.

QUESTION: Last year, you guys set aside [USD] 3 million for democracy in Iran and some of those were supposed to go

to groups inside Iran. It's my understanding that none -- none of the funding actually did go directly to groups inside Iran. And I'm wondering if we can get a detailed breakdown of where that money was spent and is -- what is -- in this year -- is that 3 million of last year analogous to 10 million this year? I mean, how much -- what -- as far as going to these groups?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yeah, I think the purpose of the 3 -- and I think it was actually 3-and-a-half million and we can give you the exact list of grantees. As I said in the beginning, it is probably impossible right now to find a group inside Iran that you could be confident wasn't infiltrated. And so, we have said from the beginning that we'll be working with American and international NGOs, and those NGOs will be working with groups inside of Iran.

So, we also didn't have the ability in the '05 money to grant funds directly from the U.S. Government to groups in Iran because we didn't have the OFAC licenses. So, one of the key differences that she announced today is that we'll get these umbrella OFAC licenses. We will make every attempt to be able to work directly with groups inside of Iran.

There may be a number of reasons why we -- you know, need to work through NGOs, whether it's because we need to be able to track our funds in a way that is -- you know, more transparent, whether it's because we want to work with individuals in Iran. It may be that they -- as we have talked about before, in a system as repressive as the Iranian system is, it's very hard for anybody to form an NGO. I mean, how do you form an NGO? How do you apply to the government? There's no way to have some kind of a transparent process through which you can set up an entity to accept funds.

And so, the way that we are beginning is to try to work with individuals to help them build those networks. We will make every effort, you know, as I said, to work with groups in Iran to the extent that we can directly, but we think working through NGOs, whether they're American or international, is also a very important step and is a good way to help encourage democracy there.

QUESTION: Yeah, I was just wondering, at a time when the cooperation of China and Russia are critical to the effort to diplomatically isolate Iran, do you actually believe that pressing for democracy at this time is going to induce those countries to further help in this effort? Or, on the other hand, is there a risk that it could undercut the cooperation, particularly with China, which obviously is not -- you just slapped them around for being -- you know, anti-democratic.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: That's not how we think about it. You know, the promotion of democracy inside Iran, inside Syria, inside other countries in the neighborhood is critical to our national security interest. It is as important as combating the terrorism that's supported and funded by Iran, as important as combating Iranians -- the Iranian regime's efforts to attain a nuclear weapon.

And we feel very strongly that the policy is not complete if you don't do all three of those things. So, you know, from our perspective, it's not a choice. It's critically important and it's -- you know, just as important a tool as the other two that we've discussed.

MR. ERELI: Glenn.

QUESTION: Just a technical point. What is the budget for this in the '07 budget, which was just released a few days ago?

I mean, are you -- would this carry over to '07? You'll be building on it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yeah, it'll carry -- the '06 supplemental funds will carry over into '07. I don't know whether the Congress will make them two-year funds or exactly how they'll -- what limit they'll put on them. I think they're normally two-year funds.

The Secretary also said this morning, I believe, that if it looks like we need to, she will reprogram monies in the '07 budget. We have large funding for democracy globally, and we have the funding that's in the Near-East Bureau for democracy that's not broken down by country. But to the extent that we feel we need to actually specify a certain portion of that will be going for Iran, we'll go back to the Congress and let them know what that'll be, above and beyond the '06 supplemental request.

QUESTION: Just so I understand this, so effectively, this money would be spent both this year and in '07, but if you are really getting ahead of steam, you'll add to the '07 --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yeah, it'll depend upon the language Congress uses, but normally, they -- the money they give us can be spent over a two-year period and so, I would anticipate that's how this would work.

MR. ERELI: Saul.

QUESTION: Can you just spell out the policy for promoting democracy? How is it that you expect the content on VOA and the other outlets to actually help promote democracy?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: You know, I think that the content and the broadcasting issue is about promoting democracy, but it's also about connecting with the Iranian people. It's about giving them information. It's about helping them to build networks. You know, one of the things that was very successful, has been very successful in the past both during the Cold War and also with the Persian radio service from VOA, before the creation of Radio Farda, was its ability to help people organize.

You know, you had a situation several years ago during the demonstrations in Tehran, where students were using their cell phones to call into the RFE/RL headquarters in Prague to leave messages about where people should meet, where people should go. It becomes a network for people to use as well. So I think part of the issue is getting the information out; getting information out about, you know, the issue of the difficulties that the establishment -- the commitment of the significant amounts of funds to the development of a nuclear weapon would pose for the regime internationally, sending a message to people that, you know, this is isolating you, sort of giving them a window into the outside world in a way, frankly, that we know is important because the regime opposes it so much and the regime takes such an effort to block broadcast, to block internet access, which tells you that they are very concerned about the power that those things can have.

MR. ERELI: In the back, sir.

QUESTION: Yes. I'm from Voice of America. First of all, we broadcast three hours in radio (inaudible) one hour TV.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: (Laughter) All right. I was close. You were right.

QUESTION: There are several groups inside America and also in Europe vying for getting support from the U.S. Government. Is the U.S. Government willing to give any support to these groups, other than Mujahedin-e-Khalq which you have categorized as a terrorist group?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: We actually have a team of people this week in Los Angeles from the State Department meeting with different members of the Iranian Diaspora talking to different groups who are operating the radio broadcasts out of Los Angeles into Iran to get a real sense of sort of what their messages are, what their reach is, what their objectives are, looking for ways that we can work together. I think that the diaspora community can be an incredibly important asset and resource for us. And so we've undertaken sort of two mapping exercises. The first one has been of our own capabilities internally, and the second one has been to look at what the private sector is doing, what the Diaspora is doing and we are very interested in working with the Diaspora as much as we can to help get the messages out.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on (inaudible?)

MR. ERELI: Just a few more questions. Let me go to Steve and then Janine and we'll go to you, Elise, and that'll be it. Okay?

QUESTION: Following up on the previous two questions. First of all, is the aim here to bring about strikes, protests, and other things that will force regime change? That will be maybe the perception of some and I wonder if you could address that? And secondly, in the context of the last question, particularly the Los Angeles outlet, a lot of them -- a lot of these groups are with monarchist factions and MEK-type groups. How concerned are you about aligning yourself with groups that might be unsavory or with whom the United States might not agree?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: That's why we're doing a mapping exercise. I think we're well aware that, you know, it's important for a Diaspora community to come together and to be unified. And you know, our position is the Iranian people deserve freedom. We haven't taken any position on the other issues, and I think it would not be appropriate for us to align ourselves with any group espousing a particular viewpoint in terms of, you know, the monarchists or those who are advocating a referendum, for example. But we want to know the lay of the land. We want to know what's out there, we want to know, you know, what the messages are, how they're reaching the people inside of Iran.

But I think for example this idea of satellite radios will be a very interesting one. You know, it's much easier to hide a satellite radio transmitter. It's much easier and more effective in some ways to reach more people through satellite radio than it might be through satellite television. So we'll be looking at a whole range of ways, Steven, that we can reach out.

In terms of the first question, we think the Iranian people deserve to live in freedom. And if you watch how people across the globe over the course of the last couple of decades, in particular, have been able to sort of rise up and call for their own freedom, it's been through organization. And I think the solidarity model is a good one, where you have sort of numbers of people coming together. You know, you had the labor unions in Poland come together, but they also then were joined by the academics, by human rights activists. When people organize themselves and really become unified in calling for change, then you get the change that you need, and we believe that the Iranian people deserve change.

MR. ERELI: Janine?

QUESTION: I didn't see the -- this request in her original draft speech to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee today. When was it decided to add the \$75 million and why was it added? Was it added this week in response to, I don't know, their enriching uranium and we've got to do something about a (inaudible) change, was it in response to hardliners who have criticized the Administration for not doing enough for democracy promotion?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: No. We had been thinking about and talking about for some time now the fact that we needed more resources, the fact that we wanted to include more funds in the supplemental. And the question was much more of one of how do you announce that publicly? When do you make the announcement? Is it, you know, best to do it through some sort of a formal speech? So, we had been having these discussions and it was decided that actually this was the right opportunity that, frankly, we want to get moving. You know, we want to be able to put these requests for application out on the street for the \$10 million in '06 and we didn't want to do that until, you know, she had talked about the fact that we were going to be doing it. So you know, we are seized with the importance and the urgency of moving quickly, that was not any particular even, you know, this week or last week that suddenly made us decide to put this in. I think we've known, you know, for some time now about the nature of the regime and the challenge that we face and what we need to do about it.

QUESTION: Was that right, there was a late edition to her remarks?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yes, that is true.

QUESTION: So when did they add it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: I don't know when precisely it was put in, but it was -- and I don't think it matters, frankly, because the issue was really much more do we wait and have her give a speech or do you just use his testimony as a way to get the message out?

MR. ERELI: Last question.

QUESTION: To follow up on the Steve's question about unsavory characters and the MEK, there's kind of this unusual situation with the MEK that it's listed as a terrorist organization; you don't do business with them. But there are groups that are under different aliases aligned with the MEK, raising money in this country, individuals that are holding press conferences, that used to be members of the MEK that now have another name that are talking about the nuclear issue. Could you kind of flesh that out? And is there any thought to taking MEK off the list? I'm not sure what their support is in Iran, but the diaspora around the world seems to have a very large following?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Elise, I don't want to go beyond, you know, what our policy is which is that they're on the terrorist list. We consider them a terrorist organization, and we are not giving any thought to taking them off the list at this point.

QUESTION: But how do you reconcile the fact that there are members that use -- you know, last month they were members of the MEK; today they're the Coalition for Democracy in Iran, and they're still raising money that is suspected

of going to the MEK?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: You know, we're concerned about any activity that provides funds for terrorist organizations. And funds for the MEK would fall under that same rubric. Thanks.

QUESTION: And you're vetting these groups you're meeting? You're vetting these groups you're meeting with to make sure they don't have these MEK connections?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Yes. Absolutely. We're vetting these groups to ensure that they don't have any unsavory connections, and not just the groups we meet with, but groups that we're going to be providing funds to.

MR. ERELI: Thanks very much.

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