Statement in Support of Rob Malley

Every presidential transition invites a reconsideration of domestic and foreign policies. Under the Trump administration, a relentlessly belligerent approach, dubbed "maximum pressure," defined U.S. policy toward Iran and repeatedly brought the two nations to the brink of war. The Biden administration has affirmed its interest in diplomatic re-engagement, including a return to the original 2015 nuclear agreement with the Islamic Republic, but proponents of what has proved to be a failed strategy appear intent already to undermine these efforts. Their response to the potential appointment of Robert Malley, President and CEO of the International Crisis Group, as special envoy for Iran is a case in point.

Malley is among the most respected foreign policy experts in the United States. An astute analyst and accomplished diplomat, he previously served as chief White House negotiator in the talks that led to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, a robust multilateral agreement that significantly curbed Iran's nuclear program. Additionally, Malley was critical to the safe return of American hostages held by the Iranian government – a role he played during his time with the Obama administration, as well as afterwards.

Those who accuse Malley of sympathy for the Islamic Republic have no grasp of – or no interest in – true diplomacy, which requires a level-headed understanding of the other side's motivations and knowledge that can only be acquired through dialogue.

Diplomatic engagement is as critical with foes as it is with friends. As the head of the world's premier conflict prevention organization, Malley's mandate – and that of the organization – is to speak with all parties to a conflict to better understand their perspectives and perceived interests in order to identify possible areas of agreement and resolution. It is no surprise that those who reject the primacy of diplomacy as a tool of statecraft see engagement with adversaries as appearement.

The Trump administration's policy of bluster and saber rattling has failed; the Biden administration needs to restore its credibility in the eyes of the international community. Partisans and ideologues who seem unable to learn from history and see only zero-sum solutions – in sanctions, siege, and the threat of military action – can no longer be allowed to dictate the policies and staffing of the U.S. government. This is especially true when their purported solution has resulted in the expansion of Iran's nuclear program, further deterioration of human rights in Iran, and unprecedented polarization among Iranian diaspora groups and organizations.

The smear tactics, personal attacks, and politicization that has marked the past four years should not determine the trajectory of the next four. Human rights defenders inside Iran, who see diplomacy, reviving the nuclear agreement, and the de-escalation of tensions as critical components to advance core human rights goals need to be heard. The "maximum pressure" era produced the worst of all worlds: impoverishment of the Iranian people, mounting international concern about Iran's nuclear program, and simmering regional tensions.

The human rights situation in Iran has considerably deteriorated; there is no question that Iran's egregious human rights record is much worse than when the nuclear deal was negotiated. At the same time, the maximum pressure campaign has resulted in an extremely isolated Iran, with an economy on the brink of collapse. The impact of this crisis on Iran's most vulnerable populations has been significant, as they are all much worse off than in previous years. Iran's civil society is also weaker and more isolated, making it harder for them to advocate for change. To this end, while we believe a return to the nuclear agreement is essential, we also encourage the Biden administration at the highest levels to ensure its foreign policy towards Iran includes a comprehensive policy that also genuinely addresses human rights concerns. We believe strongly that the U.S. can engage simultaneously on security and non-proliferation as well as on human rights.

As veterans of diplomacy and human rights work, and organizations that support the same, we hope that someone as capable and knowledgeable as Rob Malley is put in charge of fixing our broken policy towards Iran. After all, this kind of experience is essential to advancing America's national interest, bringing greater peace and stability to the region, and looking for ways to integrate human rights in the region into the broader U.S. foreign policy.

INDIVIDUALS

Affiliations listed for identification purposes only

Paul Aarts, University of Amsterdam

Jamal Abdi, President, National Iranian American Council

Andrew Albertson, Executive Director, Foreign Policy for America

Ervand Abrahamian, Professor Emeritus of City University of New York

Gordon Adams, Former OMB Associate Director for National Security Programs (1993-97)

Bijan Ahmadi, Executive Director, Institute for Peace & Diplomacy

Niki Akhavan, Associate Professor

Rewan Al-Haddad, Human Rights Advocate

Iram Ali, Interim Director of Campaigns, Kairos

Abolhasan Alighardashi

Mahsa Alimardani, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford

Mehdi Amininzadeh, Former Political Prisoner and Former Student Activist

Mark Appleton, Former Assistant Coordinator for Iran Nuclear Implementation, Department of State

Peyman Aref, Iranian Journalist and Former Political Prisoner

Skip Auld

Arash Azizi, Adjunct Instructor, New York University

Sina Azodi, Non-Resident Fellow, Atlantic Council

Paul Barker

Nora Barker

Peter Beinart, NY

Emma Belcher, President, Ploughshares Fund

Jeremy Ben-Ami, President, J Street

Aurelia Brazeal, Ambassador (retired)

Susan F. Burk, Former Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation

Karen Busch

Thanassis Cambanis, Senior Fellow, The Century Foundation

John Cavanagh, Director, Institute for Policy Studies

Ben Chang, Former National Security Council Director of Communications

Joe Cirincione, Distinguished Fellow, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

Kim Clark, HandsFreeComputing.org

Tom Collina, Policy Director, Ploughshares Fund

Ryan Costello, Policy Director, National Iranian American Council

Thomas Countryman, Former Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation

Kelsey Davenport, Director for Nonproliferation Policy, Arms Control Association

Glyn Davies, Ambassador (retired)

Kirkpatrick Day, Former USAID Office of Transition Initiatives Country Representative

Iraq/Afghanistan/Kosovo

Barbara Deekle, Former Peace Corps Volunteer

Hossein Derakhshan, Former Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School, Former Evin Prisoner

Suzanne DiMaggio, Senior Fellow, Carnegie Endowment; Board Chair, Quincy Institute

Michelle Dover, Program Director, Ploughshares Fund

Lisa Down

Drewery Dyke, Rights Realisation Centre (UK)

Paul Eaton, Major General (retired)

Naomi Egel, Janne Nolan Nuclear Security Visiting Fellow, Truman Center for National Policy

Kaveh Ehsani, Assistant Professor, DePaul University

Tarek El-Baradi, Doctor of Biochemistry

Hassan El-Tayyab, Legislative Manager for Middle East Policy, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Fadi Elsalameen, Senior Fellow, American Security Project

Ebrahim Eskafi, Former Political Prisoner

Erica Fein, Advocacy Director, Win Without War

Mark Fitzpatrick, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for NonProliferation (Acting)

James Foster, Professor Emeritus, Oregon State University

Judy Friesem

Joan Gaughan, Peace Corps Iran

Shervin Ghaffari, Policy Analyst, National Iranian American Council

Mohammad Ghaffarian, Project Consultant, United for Iran

Roy Ghazimorad

Beth Goodson, Former Peace Corps Volunteer, Iran

Joel Gordon, Professor

Stephen Gottlieb, Professor Emeritus, Albany Law School

Nina Hachigian, U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN (2014-2017), retired

Sara Haghdoosti, Deputy Director, Win Without War

Sherry Hakimi, Commissioner, NYC Commission on Gender Equity

Amir Handjani, Truman National Security Fellow

Brad Hanson, Retired US Diplomat, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Iran

Nader Hashemi, Director of the Center for Middle East Studies, University of Denver

Farnoosh Hashemian, New York

Neil Hicks, Former Director at Human Rights First

Diane Hollister

Cameron Hume, Ambassador (retired)

Jane Hunter, Professor of History, Emerita, Lewis & Clark College

Tom Hushek, Ambassador (retired)

Zaid Hydari, Executive Director, Refugee Solidarity Network

Peyman Jafari, Postdoctoral Research Associate at Princeton University

Les Janka, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

Beth Jones, Former Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia

Rachel Jordan, OR

Mary Kaszynski, Deputy Policy Director, Ploughshares Fund

Laura Kennedy, former U.S. Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament

Bijan Khajehpour, Managing Partner, Eurasian Nexus Partners

Amed Khan, President, Paradigm Global Group Inc.

Azam Khatam, York University

Daryl Kimball, Executive Director, Arms Control Association

Mary King, Peace Corps Iran

Kate Kizer, Policy Director, Win Without War

Anne Laird

Anthony Lake, Former National Security Advisor

Fraser Lang, Former Iran Peace Corps Volunteer

Daniel Larison, Senior Editor, The American Conservative

Richard LeBaron, Ambassador (retired)

Mark Leonard, Director, European Council on Foreign Relations

Graham Lewis, Advocacy Team Member, FCNL

John Limbert, Former State Dept Officer Responsible for Iran

George Lopez, Hesburgh Professor of Peace Studies, emeritus

William Luers, Ambassador (retired)

Kathleen MacLeod, Former Iran Peace Corps Volunteer

Daniel Mahanty, Director, US Program, Center for Civilians in Conflict

Eileen Malloy, Ambassador (retired)

Eldar Mamedov, European Parliament

Paul Kawika Martin, Senior Director, Policy and Political Affairs, Peace Action

Jessica Mathews, Distinguished Fellow and Former President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Alex McCoy, Political Director, Common Defense

Alyssa Milano, CA

Stephen Miles, Executive Director, Win Without War

Seraj Mirdamadi, Former political prisoner in Iran

Azin Mohajerin, Researcher, Miaan Group

Negar Mortazavi, Political analyst and host of Iran Podcast

Mani Mostofi, Human rights advocate, director of the Miaan Group

Nahid Motie, Sociologist and human rights activist

Ali-Akbar Mousavi, Former Political Prisoner and Former Member of Parliament in Iran

Mark Munkittrick

Cory Munson, Educator, Writer

Robert K. Musil, President & CEO, Rachel Carson Council

N. Bruce Nelson, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Taft Iran

Frederick Noland, Peace Corps Iran 1956-67

Orly Noy, Human Rights Activist

Rouzbeh Parsi, Director, European Middle East Research Group

Eric Pelofsky, Former SAP and Senior Director for North Africa and Yemen, National Security Council

Nancy Penrose

Danny Postel, Assistant Director, Center for International & Area Studies, Northwestern University

Rick Price, Retired Geographer (Studied in Iran, 1968)

Assal Rad, Senior Research Fellow, National Iranian American Council

Yasmin Radjy, Board Member, NIAC Action

Amir Rashidi, Human Rights Advocate, Miaan Group

Charles Ray, Former Ambassador to Cambodia and Zimbabwe

Ben Rhodes, Former Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications

Bill Richardson, Former Governor of New Mexico

Aida Saadat, Iranian Women's Rights Activist

Shirin Saeidi, Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Arkansas

James Schumaker, OSCE Ambassador to Ukraine (2005-2008)

Sue Scott, Advocacy Team Member, FCNL

Anna Scott-Hinkle, Advocacy Team Member, FCNL

David Segal, Demand Progress Education Fund

Sahil Shah, Policy Fellow, European Leadership Network

Annelle Sheline, Research Fellow, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

Annie Shiel, Senior Advisor for US Policy & Advocacy, Center for Civilians in Conflict

Mohamadreza Shokouhifard, Political Activist

Sarah Shourd, Journalist, Playwright and Former Political Hostage in Iran

Gary Sick, Columbia University, Former NSC Aide for Iran

Leslie Silvey

Daniel Sjursen, Major (retired), US Army

Barbara Slavin, Director, Future of Iran Initiative, the Atlantic Council

Dana Shell Smith, Ambassador (retired)

Mohamed Soltan, President, The Freedom Initiative

Mary Anne Sotos, Retired Senior Intelligence Officer, CIA

Jackie Spurlock, Current Board Member, Peace Corps Iran Association

Jort Statema, General Manager Cinetree

Tom Stave, Eugene Friends Church

Lior Sternfeld, Penn State University

Yasmine Taeb, DNC Committeewoman (2016-2020)

Sussan Tahmasebi, Women's Rights Defender & Executive Director of FEMENA

Mahnoosh Tehrani, CIBT

Greg Thielmann, Arms Control Association Board Member, Former Foreign Service Officer

Harry Thomas, Ambassador

John Tierney, Former Member of Congress; Current Executive Director of Council for a Livable World and of Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation

John Tirman, Executive Director, MIT Center for International Studies

Farshad Toomadj

Sina Toossi, Senior Research Analyst

Sanam Vakil, Deputy Director Chatham House Middle East North Africa Programme

Grace Wall

Jim Walsh, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Stephen Walt, Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School

Roger Wangsness, Former Peace Corps Staff in Iran

Howard Whitaker

Jon Wiant, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State of Intelligence Coordination, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, State Department

Lawrence Wilkerson, Former Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell

Dylan Williams, Senior Vice President for Policy and Strategy, J Street

Geoff Wilson, Political Director, Council for a Livable World

Carolyn Yale, Former President, Peace Corps Iran Association

Hamidreza Yazdani

Younes Zangiabadi, Executive Vice-President of the Institute for Peace & Diplomacy

ORGANIZATIONS

Bourse & Bazaar Foundation

Center for International Policy

Common Defense

Daily Kos

Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)

FEMENA

Foreign Policy for America

Freedom Forward

Historians for Peace and Democracy

Institute for Policy Studies, New Internationalism Project

J Street

Miaan Group

MoveOn

MPower Action

National Iranian American Council

Open Society Foundations

Partners For Rights

Peace Action

Peace Corps Iran Association

Physicians for Social Responsibility

Ploughshares Fund

Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)

ReThinking Foreign Policy

The Iran Project

The Quincy Institute

Truman National Security Project

VoteVets

Win Without War

Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation