

**Remarks of General James L. Jones**  
**March 12, 2013**  
**The Middle East and the Plight of Iranian Refugees**

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- Thank you very much. Thank you to everyone here today for joining us. Thank you Senator Sessions for your welcome. I'd especially like to welcome the members of the Senate and Senate staff who are here. This is a very important event and a very serious topic we're discussing.
- I'd like to express my deepest appreciation to Speaker Gingrich and Congressman Kennedy for their service to our country and for adding their voice to this important discussion. I'd also like to thank Congressman Lee Hamilton for his lifelong dedication to human rights and all that he has done to advance America's principles and values across the globe.
- We live in complex and pivotal times, in which the world faces a wide spectrum of challenges to peace and stability. None of these threats, however, are greater than the Iranian government's determination to acquire weapons of mass destruction.
- In addition to spawning a catastrophic regional arms race and arming a rogue regime with the tools of devastation and nuclear blackmail, we can be confident that the spread of WMD by Iran would include the terrorist organizations the Mullahs sponsor so diligently. Such an eventuality is unacceptable and it must never come to pass!
- We all hope for progress at the P5 + 1 negotiating table; but our optimism must be tempered by experience...experience characterized by the regime's cynical and disingenuous abuse of the so-called "talks" to placate, stall, and deceive while its nuclear program proceeds uninterrupted.
- We've seen this playbook before. The Iranian regime artfully dodges its commitments, generating international friction to exert greater domestic control on its people, and harden its grip on them.
- But its push for WMD and sponsorship terrorism is only part of the story. The Iranian regime serially violates human rights, UN Security Council resolutions, and international law, and routinely stiff-arms all diplomatic efforts with regard to problem solving.
- Iran clearly seeks regional hegemony and persistently threatens its neighbors.
- It rejects the right of Israel to exist and both opposes and actively undermines the Middle East Peace Process.
- And the Iranian regime remains the chief antagonist of democracy and liberalization across the arc of the Arab Spring where a better future is struggling to emerge for millions of people.



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- Ahmadinejad and the Mullahs know that the fall of Bashir Assad and the loss of Syria as a client state would be an enormous loss for them and they are doing all in their power to see to it that this doesn't happen.
- Despite the Iranian flow of weapons, manpower, and materiel to Assad, which enables him to make war on his people and turn hundreds of thousands of Syrians into refugees, I believe it's only a matter of time before Assad joins the ranks of Ben Ali, Gadhafi and Saddam Hussein.
- No one can yet say exactly how the "Middle East and North African Spring" will play out, at least in the short run. There will be fits and starts in the uneasy journey of true reform and transformation. This is normal.
- And the outcome from country to country will likely differ; but what's very clear is that we find ourselves at a historic inflexion point..... and the stakes are monumental!.....akin to those in the twilight of our long struggle in the Cold War.
- The promise of change can only be fully realized if the governments which follow in the aftermath of struggle are committed to the kind of reform that the people taking to the streets demand—a future of greater freedom, greater dignity, greater opportunity, and greater participation in the way they are governed.
- In far too many cases, however, the radical elements are proving, at least initially, to be the most organized and best poised to fill the vacuum of leadership created by the fall of dictators.
- This presents yet another enormous challenge to the quest for true freedom and change. It challenges to support the legitimate reformers who earnestly seek to fulfill the hopes of millions and their struggle against those who would merely replace one form of tyranny with another.
- There are many things we can and should do to bolster the true reformers and consign radical intolerance to the dustbin of history where it belongs. Part of the formula for success lies in understanding the nature and ambitions of the various factions in play...knowing what each stands for and intends for their country...and helping as much as we can those who genuinely strive for a better future, without strengthening the radical elements of the opposition who will stop at nothing to make a bad situation much worse.
- We must work with our allies to create specially tailored and comprehensive packages of economic, political, and security measures to assist emerging governments, provided they are constituted to respect human rights, abide by the rule of law, and genuinely seek peace and freedom.
- Perhaps strategically the most important single action the United States and the international community can undertake to help improve global security is to re-energize the Middle East



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Peace Process. Nothing, in my view, would do more to calm regional tensions, undermine the terrorist appeal, and foster stability, than to achieve an enduring peace between the Israelis and Palestinians through a two-state solution.

- We can be sure that the Iranian regime knows that, and like its Syrian intrigues, it persists in fanning the flames of conflict and obstructing Middle East peacemaking.
- Ladies and gentlemen, the United States remains the most influential country on earth, and we are counted on to lead! We are still the only nation that can motivate all parties to overcome rejectionist influence and loosen the vice grip of the sides' political inertia, in order to get the process not just moving again, but across the finish line.
- Another front on which our interests are great and our leadership essential, is in promoting security and cooperation between Iraq, the northern Kurdish region, and Turkey. This will not be easy considering the current trends and orientation of the Maliki government in Baghdad.
- Last year, I was invited, along with ten other former senior American government officials, to meet privately with Prime Minister Maliki. It was among the most discouraging meetings I have ever attended. The Prime Minister treated us to a 30-minute presentation on his vision for Iraq's foreign policy, the essence of which was Iraq's so-called "neutrality" in regional and international affairs.
- He told us, quote, "We Live and let live...We don't interfere in other countries' affairs and they don't interfere in ours." Given Iraq's overt support for Assad and more-than-cozy relationship with Iran's rulers –two of the world's illegal and most brutal regimes, such a patently ludicrous claim was beyond cynical.....frankly, given our enormous sacrifice over the past decade, it was insulting.
- As far back as 2009, knowledgeable leaders in the Middle East warned about the likelihood that Maliki's Iranian tendencies would take Iraq down the wrong path. Sadly, they appear to be right thus far despite our best efforts.
- Nowhere is the dissatisfaction with the Iraqi central government more resounding than in the region we now call "Kurdistan". The Kurdish people love the United States and are eternally grateful to us for coming to their rescue in the early 1990s when Saddam Hussein incited a human stampede of millions across the border into the mountains of southern Turkey and Iran, in fear of another chemical and biological attack by his army.
- The departure of U.S. combat troops from Iraq created a vacuum of influence that has not been filled. It is squarely in America's strategic interest to help remedy that deficiency by promoting the development of American business in the KRG where we are welcome, and in broader Iraq, when and where we can, despite the formidable obstacles that exist.



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- President Barzani stated the case powerfully when he said that the presence of five American companies would be the equal of two U.S. Army divisions in terms of long-term influence and stability in the area.
- Contrast this with the broader Iraq's indifference toward greater U.S. economic engagement. At the Georgetown session I asked the Prime Minister why, given the enormous sacrifice made by America to win the Iraqi people the chance for a better life, U.S. companies seemed to receive little consideration over those of other nations who shed no blood and expended no treasure for Iraqi freedom but now benefit from Iraqi indifference. The Prime Minister responded only that he "warmly welcomes" American firms in Iraq.
- For many American companies, the Prime Minister's "warm welcome" to American firms has consisted of threatening to cut them off from future business in Iraq as punishment for exercising their legal right to sign contracts with the Kurdish region.
- During his recent trip to the region, Secretary Kerry correctly expressed the concern that Iraq is "just dragging us along" -- in a wide range of areas.
- Tensions between the KRG and Iraq's central government are increasing over oil concessions, economic relations, and energy development with Turkey. It is strategically imperative that the United States help cool these tensions. We can do that by helping broker energy infrastructure, notably oil pipelines, in a way that serves the economic and political interests of Erbil, Baghdad, Ankara and Washington, and in so doing avoid the very real prospect of a return to hostilities, which would mean even greater instability in this fragile region.
- Unfortunately, Maliki's intrigues with Iran and Syria are still being rewarded and the Kurd's loyalty, thus far, is going unreciprocated. It may be time to refine our "one Iraq" policy to ensure that it serves the interests of all of Iraq, including the autonomous regions, and those of our friends in Turkey as well.
- Perhaps the most notable example of where we diverge with Iraq applies to the principal reason we gather here today, and that is what appears to be a global reluctance to offend the Maliki government's complicity regarding a growing human rights debacle in Iraq.
- It's time for candor...and it's time to separate fact from fiction with regard to the refugees of Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty.
- In Iraq, today, 3200 Iranian refugees—people who have helped us... people who have cooperated with us...people we promised to protect...people who are entitled to justice—continue to languish in deplorable conditions. They remain homeless, stripped of their rights, living in confinement under constant threat of attack and murder, and mainly because they hope for a better future for their native country next door.



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- Despite America's pledges, Iraq's promises, and the international community's obligation to protect this unarmed group of refugees, an unconscionable humanitarian crisis grinds on while the world responds with stunning indifference.
- I think it would be instructive if perhaps we reviewed how we got to where we are today...to understand the facts clearly...and then highlight what must be done to right this shameful injustice.
- In that regard, and I hope he's here today, I'd like to acknowledge the work done by Ambassador Lincoln Bloomfield, who recently published a must-read document that clearly defines what is and what isn't with regard to the people of Camp Ashraf, their history, and the history of the MEK. And after people read that, then come back and we'll talk a little bit more and I'm sure you will be enlightened by his study and his findings. I'd like to thank you very much for that.
- In 1986, the M.E.K., a group of men, women, and children who opposed Iran's Mullah regime, was provided safe haven in Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, taking up refuge at Camp Ashraf in Iraq's Diyala province.
- Over the ensuing years the Iranian regime has attacked Camp Ashraf 22 times. In 1992, 13 Iranian-sponsored F-4 fighter jets dropped tons of ordnance on the camp. In 2001, the regime launched 77 missiles attempting to obliterate Ashraf and its residents.
- When Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched to oust Saddam Hussein in October of 2003, the group voluntarily disarmed and cooperated fully with the United States and our allies.
- The group was screened for terrorist elements. None having been found, the residents were promised coalition protection and we enjoyed their full cooperation – indeed their friendship.
- In 2008, the United States and Government of Iraq concluded a Status of Forces Agreement. Upon the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2009 the "responsibility to protect" the refugees of Camp Ashraf reverted to Iraq—a responsibility the Maliki government pledged to fulfill.
- What has happened since the handover? Here are the facts:
- Fact: the refugees have been repeatedly subjected to psychological and physical harassment, violence, and the threat of violence both by Iraqi authorities and Iranian provocateurs.
- Fact: on July 28 and 29, 2009, the Iraqi military launched an unprovoked attack on the camp..... killing 11 and injuring 500. The raid occurred just as Maliki had returned from the US and while the



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U.S. Secretary of Defense was visiting Baghdad—in what was sure to be an ironic insult conjured up by Iraqi leaders to further please the Iranian regime.

- Fact: On April 8, 2011, after meeting with Secretary Gates, Iraq security forces entered Camp Ashraf with armored personnel carriers and other military vehicles—equipment that the United States supplied to them. Again, completely unprovoked, the Iraqi military took up positions around the Camp and began its assault, killing 36 unarmed residents and injuring 345.
- Pictures and video footage recorded the massacre, including the shooting of unarmed women and children. Inexplicably, and in my view inexcusably, both of these attacks were virtually ignored by the global community and international media.
- Fact: last year, the Iraqi government announced the closure of Camp Ashraf. The Iraqi government's insistence on the move was accompanied by its assurances...ours...and those of the United Nations to the residents that their removal to the former Camp Liberty outside Baghdad would be carefully executed...that the camp would be prepared to receive them in safe, sanitary, and proper condition, and from there the refugees would be resettled to third countries in swift and orderly fashion. The UN appointed a special envoy to oversee the situation and ensure the refugees' humanitarian treatment.
- Fact: The international community has failed.
- The 3100 residents of the ironically named Camp Liberty – a facility renamed Camp Hurriya, but one which could more aptly be named "Camp Shame," ...and 100 at Camp Ashraf, all continue to live in poor and oppressive conditions, deprived of proper medical care and legal rights.
- The facility at Camp Hurriya has become more of a prison than a camp. It is interesting to note that the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay – real terrorists -- who are properly housed, clothed, fed, protected, provided medical care, legal representation, transfer to third countries, and even translation services, are treated far better than these those who have counted on our assurances and sense of right and commitment.....and they have been abused and consistently disappointed.
- Fact: At Camp Liberty cases of meningitis have been uncovered threatening the residents. In some cases the deceased have not been allowed the proper burial rites. At Liberty, one corpse was held above ground for one year before being buried. According to Muslim tradition, the deceased should be buried immediately—rites accorded even to Osama Bin Laden.
- Fact: The promise that the refugee's relocation to Camp Hurriya would be followed by swift third-country resettlement has thus far proved to be another fiction.



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- Since the transfer from Ashraf to Liberty, more people have perished than have been transferred abroad. In fact, nine refugees have perished...and 100 have been injured, while only seven have been resettled out of the country -- a lesser number than have been released from Guantanamo Bay.
- Fact: most recently, just a few weeks ago Camp Hurriya – and remember we are talking about a **refugee camp** – under the observation and auspices of the United Nations -- was rocketed, resulting in the murder of six residents.
- I was informed that neither the US Ambassador to Iraq nor the UN Special Representative for Iraq, Martin Kobler, have visited the camp since the attack because they have been “advised that conditions are too dangerous”..... which makes the point precisely!
- In the four weeks since the attack, the Iraqi Government still has not returned the bodies of those killed in the most recent attack.
- Again, everyone agrees that the best course to resolve the humanitarian situation is rapid third-party resettlement of the refugees. That has been a stated goal of the UN and the United States. Yet the process remains glacially slow. At the current pace this process is projected to take three to 10 years to complete.
- Every day that passes brings with it the threat of more rockets, additional raids, and an increased death toll.
- It is the responsibility of all countries of good will to ensure that the victimization of the Ashraf refugees is not perpetuated and that this tragedy comes to a swift and just conclusion.
- It pains me to say that a significant part of the problem is that the United States has not provided the customary leadership we usually bring to humanitarian calamities of this type.
- We have not yet agreed to take some number of the refugees – many of whom are professionals: doctors, lawyers, and teachers -- to set an example for other countries, even though the Iranian-American community has stepped up and offered to sponsor a large number here in the United States.
- Here’s one more fact. This year the United States is set to admit 70,000 asylum-seeking refugees from around the world; yet we continue to dither in setting a number we will receive among a group that has helped provide vital intelligence on Iran, a group which has been cleared of terrorist connections, a group that is feared and despised by the Iranian leadership and mistreated by Iraq.....all because they espouse the desire for a modern, democratic, nuclear-free Iran that is at peace with its neighbors.





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- Something is terribly wrong with that picture. It reminds me of the words of Edmund Burke that have so often inspired America's role in the world: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing."
- The United States is admired and respected as the global champion of democracy, human rights, and rule of law. Not only is it our duty to live up to that responsibility, it is firmly in our interest.
- I have great hope and confidence that the incoming national security team including Secretary Kerry, Secretary Hagel, and John Brennan will help us right this wrong...that they will act on the facts...and in accordance with America's support for the oppressed of the world who deserve their place in the sunlight of freedom and opportunity.
- These three leaders have spent their whole lives doing the right thing when it mattered most; when they look at the facts they'll recognize what needs to be done. We cannot rely on Baghdad and Tehran to do the right thing, and we cannot, unfortunately, rely on some in our own media to sound the alarm.
- Action begins by organizing the international community to insist upon the proper treatment of the Ashraf and Hurriya refugees, including a continuous monitoring and reporting presence.
- And it requires the U.S. to announce that we will welcome a significant number of the refugees and use our pulpit to get other countries to follow suit.
- Before concluding, I would like to tell a story that I think captures the current of our times. It's one I suspect is well known to many in this room; but one we must never forget, and one I intend to keep sharing because of its profound moral implications.
- Over three and one-half years ago a beautiful 18-year old Iranian woman named Neda Agha Soltan - an aspiring musician and photographer -- was standing on the streets of Tehran. Accompanied by her music teacher she was viewing a massive protest against the regime's fraudulent presidential elections.
- Though guilty of no crime, unarmed, posing no danger except for her ideals, she was targeted by a sniper from a nearby rooftop. Moments later a bullet pierced her chest. And Neda bled to death where she fell.
- The shot was fired by a member of the Iranian militia. Almost instantaneously video footage and cell phone pictures of the killing cascaded across the Internet to every corner of the globe. It has been called the most widely witnessed death in human history.





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- The incident prepared the ground for the awakening across the region. It helped galvanize the world in opposition to a repressive regime. And it serves as a reminder of what the cause of reform is all about.
- Today, Neda has awards, scholarships, and schools named in her honor.
- I don't know what became of her murderer, but I'm betting this: history will show that Neda and the cell phone messages, electronic images, and Internet posts which shared her dreams and told her story will prove far more powerful than the assassins and the guns that tried to silence her hopes.
- That's the future we are entering...the future that should serve as a warning to the Iranian regime. To the regime's so-called leaders we say..... "your days are numbered -- not because of the condemnation and resolve of the international community that will insist on your compliance with international law. They are numbered because your people will not cease their demand for a government that reflects its hopes and aspirations".
- The fulfillment of these hopes and aspirations rest on the establishment of a united, principled, courageous and organized civic opposition – one that can touch people's heart and minds, one that can harness their passion and conviction to ensure not only that spring returns to Iran, but that spring blossoms into an enduring season of peace and prosperity.
- The global stability on which America's security and prosperity depends can't be achieved without an America that meets its obligations, lives its values, and keeps its word. If we don't, then who will?
- We can..... we must..... and I believe we will!

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