

# Words, Not War with Iran

## A Study and Action Guide for People of Faith

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Wars and rumors of wars trouble the conscience of faithful people across the United States. As we work toward peace and reconciliation, we are particularly concerned about the relationship between the United States and Iran.

At the heart of the current conflict between the U.S. and Iran is Iran's pursuit of a nuclear power program—an ambition that some believe could lead to the eventual development of nuclear weapons. Decades of mistrust and miscommunication between our governments have heightened tensions and could potentially lead us on a path to war.

As religious people, we look to the guidance of our religious traditions and see a clear mandate to work for peace. Direct engagement between the U.S. and Iran is the only way through the current impasse. We pray that our government will be guided by moral principles, political wisdom, and international legal standards and will step back from seeing military action as an option in the nuclear standoff. We call on all religious leaders, theologians, clergy, and laypersons to speak out against the possibility of war with Iran.

Sojourners/Call to Renewal and Faithful Security have developed this study and action guide in order to provide a context for the current tension between the U.S. and Iran, and to suggest means by which concerned people of conscience can come together to advocate for reconciliation. As we work to prevent another war, we will remember the people of Iran in our prayers and work to build lifelines of connection and understanding that could help to dissolve the tensions of our governments.

In the words of Jeff Carr, who represented Sojourners/Call to Renewal in a recent ecumenical delegation to Iran:

What is clear to me ... is that [Iranians and Americans] must find a way to tell our stories and to have our stories heard. And then we must begin to write a new narrative together—one that comes out of humility, mutual respect, and shared understanding. I am convinced it is the only path for a true and lasting peace with justice.

May God help both our nations and peoples to begin the healing and reconciliation process so we may avoid war and build that lasting peace.<sup>1</sup>

*Sojourners/Call to Renewal*

*Faithful Security: the National Religious Partnership on the Nuclear Weapons Danger*

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## Standing in the Gap

*By Joe Volk, Executive Secretary,  
Friends Committee on National Legislation*

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For most people in the United States, the history of U.S.-Iran relations begins with the Islamic Revolution, the deposing of America's ally the shah, and the taking of American hostages and holding them for over a year. Virtually every U.S. documentary and news story on Iran runs the iconographic video or photos of the swarm of revolutionaries taking the massive, downtown U.S. embassy. The crowds chanting "Death to America" and the murals declaring "We will make America suffer a severe defeat" are branded into the minds of most Americans.

How could Iran be anything except a dangerous enemy of the U.S.? This icon of the taking of the U.S. embassy embodies American fear and loathing of the Islamic Revolution and of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since 1979, this narrative has informed and shaped U.S. policy toward Iran.

But for Iranians the history of U.S.-Iran relations goes back at least to the CIA's overthrow of the democratically elected government of Mohammed Mossedegh in the 1950s; the installation of a monarch, the shah; years of U.S. support for his dictatorship; and the use of Iran as a regional military ally to contain the Soviet Union and to shield U.S. access to Persian Gulf oil. They remember too the outflow of Iran's oil during the shah's reign in exchange for big weapons systems, not development aid. Then followed 28 years of U.S. strategies to isolate and strangle Iran. Perhaps the final indignity was the U.S. support for Iraq, when Saddam Hussein's invasion led to the 1980-to-1988 Iraq-Iran war.

Today one hears again and again, from the ordinary Iranian to the highest Iranian government officials, "We have no problem with the American people; we love Americans, but we hate your government, because of what it has done to our country and because it continues to punish us. For what? What is our terrible sin against America?"

In February 2007, a delegation of thirteen Christian leaders from the United States journeyed to Iran to enter into dialogue with religious leaders, political figures, and the people of Iran.<sup>ii</sup>

Our delegation aimed to stand in the gap between these two narratives: a United States done wrong by Iran's Islamic revolutionaries and an Iran done wrong by U.S. imperialism. We were looking for new ground on which we might stand and begin to build a bridge between these two great countries. We asked ourselves:

Can a new narrative take account of these two different national experiences and yet articulate a new relationship between our countries? Can U.S. and Iranian religious leaders provide some help in pointing the way forward? Can our religious congregations in both countries mobilize to prevent war and to begin constructing bridges for peace?

Months later, we believe the answer is a resounding yes. We found hope in Iran, and as you learn more about the nation, we believe that you will too.

*A version of this article first appeared in [Joe Volk's online diary from Tehran](#), available at [www.fcni.org](http://www.fcni.org).<sup>iii</sup>*

## Facts about the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a country slightly larger than Alaska, with a population of over 65 million.<sup>iv</sup> Two-thirds of the population is under the age of thirty. Iran is a superpower in the Middle East, and is a modern nation with advanced medical care, a high level of literacy, sophisticated road systems, safe drinking water, skyscrapers, and air pollution.<sup>v</sup>

98 percent of Iranians are Muslim (the vast majority being Shi'a). Iran is a theocratic republic; the chief of state is Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has authority through the Iranian constitution to veto President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's decisions.

### How do Iranians feel about the American people?

While the majority of Iranians feel strongly that the U.S. government does not have Iran's best interest at hand, they feel differently about the American people, with 45% of

Iranians recently polled feeling favorably towards Americans. That's compared to 29% of Americans who felt favorably about Iranians during the same time frame.<sup>vi</sup>

*"Wherever I went in Iran people told me how much they loved America and the American people; it is our government with which they have a problem. At the same time, most Iranians I spoke to expressed disdain for their own government. I hope Americans can separate the actions of the Iranian government from the Iranian people. It has been my experience that we Americans lump together the people and government of our 'enemies' without distinction."*

*-Jim Winkler, General Board of Church and Society  
United Methodist Church<sup>vii</sup>*

### Are women oppressed in Iran?

Iranian women are well educated and highly involved in public life, but are granted limited rights by the Iranian government. Iranian law makes it difficult for a woman to escape from an abusive marriage and has different standards for men and women applying for divorce. Advocates for women's rights are often arrested and detained. Since the Islamic revolution of 1979, all women are also required to wear the *hijab* (modest covering) in public places.

*"I was helping one of our delegates with her scarf on the street one day, and some women passing by exclaimed, 'Oh, you are fixing your hijab'... I said, 'We are not accustomed to wearing the hijab.' An Iranian woman answered quietly, 'No, we aren't either.'"* *-Sister Ellen Francis, Priest and Nun, Episcopal Church<sup>viii</sup>*

**President Ahmadinejad has threatened to “wipe Israel off the map.” Does the Iranian government want to declare war on Israel?**

Although a controversy exists over the exact translation of President Ahmadinejad’s remarks<sup>ix</sup>, his statement about Israel and his participation in a recent Holocaust denial conference are inexcusable. Many moderate Iranians are uncomfortable with the President’s provocative stance, and during his tenure as President, his popularity has declined and his party lost ground in the 2006 municipal elections. President Ahmadinejad was also reprimanded by Ayatollah Khamenei over these remarks.

Despite our shock over these statements, engaging in diplomacy is not an acceptance of President Ahmadinejad’s rhetoric. Diplomacy is not meant to be applied only to friendly nations with whom we agree. The best way to ensure the security of Israel in the long run is to engage in a direct dialogue with the Iranian government over matters such as these.

**Can Christians and Jews practice religion freely in Iran?**

Estimates of the number of Christians and Jews in Iran differ widely, but the U.S. State Department estimates that there are 300,000 Christians in Iran and fewer than 30,000 Jews.<sup>x</sup> Religious minorities are sometimes subject to discrimination, but are allowed to worship privately. However, conversion from Islam to another religion is prohibited, and religious minorities are not allowed to proselytize or practice their religion publically.

**Human rights abuses seem to be common in Iran, and recently several Iranian-Americans have been abducted. Should we refuse to engage in dialogue with Iran until these issues are addressed?**

Iran’s human rights record is troubling. According to Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and the founder of the Center for Defense of Human Rights in Tehran, activists are harassed, imprisoned, and sometimes tortured, journalists and writers are not allowed to express their opinions, and newspapers are frequently shut down. Political prisoners are sometimes left in jail without due process.<sup>xi</sup>

But as Ebadi points out, a foreign invasion of Iran and the subsequent destruction of human life, institutions, and infrastructure would devastate the society it would be aiming to help. “Respect for human rights in any country must spring forth through the will of the people and as part of a genuine democratic process... the most effective way to promote human rights in Iran is to provide moral support and international recognition to independent human rights defenders and to insist that Iran adhere to the international human rights laws and conventions that it has signed. Getting the Iranian government to abide by these international standards is the human rights movement’s highest goal; foreign military intervention in Iran is the surest way to harm us and keep that goal out of reach.”<sup>xii</sup>

As participants in the recent delegation work behind the scenes to address human rights violations with Iranian officials, they point to the need for the U.S. and Iran to restore diplomatic relations so that a forum exists to address these concerns.

## Ways to Resolve the Current Conflict

### What's at Stake

Recent tensions between the U.S. and Iran stem from Iran's nuclear program, ostensibly focused on the production of nuclear energy. Although the government has repeatedly denied that nuclear weapons will be produced—often citing religious restrictions against the production of such weapons—the international community is increasingly concerned that the production of nuclear weapons could loom on the horizon.

As a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has a legal right to “the peaceful use of nuclear energy” under the condition that the nation can never develop nuclear weapons. (Under that same treaty, the U.S. has a legal commitment to disarmament.) Iran has recently resumed a uranium enrichment program, which many see as a step toward the production of nuclear weapons. Despite a UN Security Council resolution ordering a halt to such activity, Iran continues to proceed with the uranium enrichment program.

Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the United States are deeply concerned about the nuclear weapons danger in Iran, in the Middle East, and around the world. The teachings of the Abrahamic traditions command us to keep human life sacred and to act as stewards of creation. We consider all weapons of mass destruction—whether nuclear, biological or chemical—immoral and unacceptable for use in any circumstances. In pursuit of that principle, we strongly support international diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring the capability to develop nuclear weapons. At the same time, we support efforts for all nations to move toward disarmament.

Many experts agree that Iran's announcements of technical progress are exaggerated. The consensus is that Iran is 4 to 10 years from developing nuclear weapons.<sup>xiii</sup> It could take much longer, due to technical problems.

We cannot ignore the real threat of a nuclear-armed Iran, just as we cannot ignore the threat of a nuclear weapon being used in any circumstance. As we advocate for a world free of nuclear weapons—a vision now embraced by the staunchest Cold Warriors—we must work to prevent the spread of these deadly weapons.<sup>xiv</sup>

Some political leaders have argued that, in order to prevent Iran from moving ahead with its nuclear program, no option should be taken off the table. But what are the options?

### Use of Nuclear Weapons to Destroy Iran's Nuclear Facilities

If the U.S. used nuclear weapons to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities, the radioactive fallout would be devastating and lasting. The idea that a nuclear weapon of any size could be used without causing tens of thousands of civilian deaths is a dangerous delusion. One medical study predicts that a nuclear

attack capable of partially destroying Iran's nuclear facilities would kill 2.6 million people within 48 hours.<sup>xv</sup>

It is hypocritical to consider using nuclear weapons to prevent Iran from developing its own nuclear weapons program. Nuclear weapons are immoral weapons of mass destruction—a nuclear attack is not an option.

### **Conventional Military Attack on Iran's Nuclear Facilities**

People of faith disagree about when and how military force should be used to resolve conflicts. For many pacifists and proponents of just war, there is a consensus that in this case, war is not the answer.

As religious leaders stated in the September 2006 "Words, Not War" statement, another American-led war or military attack in the Middle East would likely prove disastrous. To initiate another war in an area of the world already engulfed in turmoil and human tragedy would intensify political extremism throughout the Middle East and beyond. It would add fuel to the fires of violence already consuming the region. It would exacerbate anti-American hatred and produce new recruits for terror attacks against the United States and Israel. Military action would not remove Iran's potential nuclear threat; indeed, such action would likely be a strong motivation for Iran to develop nuclear weapons. Significant military opinion says an attack would not work. Responsible theological evaluation suggests it would not be morally or strategically justified.

### **Pursue a Long-term Program of Diplomacy and Dialogue**

Diplomacy is a way of persuading another party to change their behavior—not a reward for changing behavior in the first place. Smart diplomats have used diplomacy to drastically shift policy. Diplomacy often involves both carrots and sticks in the form of incentives and sanctions. Through smart, tough-minded diplomacy, the U.S. and other nations can engage Iran and make real, long-term progress on issues important to both. Building up our relationships with Iran over many levels of society is the best way to encourage Iran to cooperate on nuclear issues, press Iran on human rights, and work together to fix Iraq.

The White House has claimed support for a diplomatic solution—but has defined that as sanctions imposed by the U.N. without direct talks or other incentives. Diplomacy by going through the motions is counterproductive. Direct engagement is what's necessary to ease tensions between the U.S. and Iran.

**"I am not a politician. I am a pastor. But I do know that in any conflict—whether in a marriage, in business or between nations—as long as the parties keep talking, there is hope."**

*Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Church, after the July 2006 North Korean missile test*

## Advocating for “Words, Not War”

Once you have worked with the materials in the “Words, Not War” study guide, you may feel led to give public witness to the need for direct engagement to relieve the tensions between the U.S. and Iran. Here are some suggestions for how to advocate for “Words, Not War.”

### **Meet with Your Member of Congress**

Set up a meeting with your member of Congress to discuss the need for direct engagement with Iran. Contact your senator or representative’s home office to check to see when he or she is in the state. For lobbying tips, see [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org).

### **Organize a Sign-On Letter**

A sign-on letter is a letter to Congress or a local elected official signed by several members of your religious community, or by a representative of the entire congregation. Members of a small committee or task force, such as the Peace and Justice Commission, should write the letter. Identify the group you represent and include signatures at the bottom. Be sure to send a copy of your letter to your regional religious body and to your denominational headquarters. Sign-on letters can also be submitted to local papers as op-ed pieces. You may wish to consider the “Words, Not War” statement (Appendix A) as a template for your own letter.

### **Congregational Resolutions**

A congregational resolution is another way for your entire religious community to make a public statement about the need for dialogue with Iran. It should be similar to a sign-on letter, but in the form of a position statement. A brief example:

**Whereas** Christians are taught to seek peace and pursue it; and **Whereas** the tensions

between the U.S. and Iran are escalating and direct engagement is crucial to progress; **Resolved** that the congregation of St. Stephen’s hereby commits to pray for peace with Iran and calls on our elected officials to advocate for a diplomatic solution to the current nuclear standoff with Iran.

*“ . . . we will light an oil lamp like this in our churches every week to remind us of our visit with you and of our common work to follow what God intends for all of us by helping to build peace.”*

*-Ron Flaming of the Mennonite Central Committee (pictured below), while presenting Ayatollah Araqi with a handmade oil lamp*

### **Write a Letter to the Editor**

Watch your local newspaper for mentions of the conflict between the U.S. and Iran. Within a few days of an article, submit a concise letter to the editor highlighting the need for dialogue with Iran. Call on the teachings of your own

religious traditions; be brief.

### **Light a Lamp for Peace**

During their visit to Iran, members of the ecumenical delegation delivered ceramic oil lamps to Iranian leaders as concrete symbols of their commitment to pray for the people of Iran and for peace between Iran and the United States. Order a lamp for your home or congregation as a reminder to keep Iran in your prayers. Read more about the lamps and order one for your home or congregation by visiting the Mennonite Central Committee’s Web site, [www.mcc.org](http://www.mcc.org).

## “Talk to Iran” Study Guide

During the February 2007 ecumenical delegation to Iran, the delegates were accompanied by a filmmaker, Jamila Paksima, who was born in Iran and lived there until the age of fourteen. After collecting hundreds of hours of footage, Paksima produced a program about the Iranian delegation for the PBS show “NOW” called “*Talking to Iran.*”

A DVD copy of the program can be purchased from the “NOW” Web site ([www.pbs.org/now/](http://www.pbs.org/now/)), and is also available for download from the Web site at no cost.

Using the documentary film as a resource, faith communities are encouraged to include a *Words, Not War* study session in group and individual study. General resources are provided below, with special resources for Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities.

### Suggested format for a *Words, Not War* Study Session

- Open with a prayer (5 minutes)
- Using the resource materials provided in this study guide, set the scene by describing the relationship between the U.S. and Iran and the current conflict (10 minutes)
- Screen the PBS program “*Talking to Iran*” (20 minutes)
- Discussion (20 minutes)

### Discussion Questions

- In the film, Rev. Shanta Premawardhana says, “How to bring [the two separate] narratives together is probably the most crucial question that is before us as we continue on this journey towards building friendship with the people of Iran.” How do you articulate those two narratives? Do you see opportunities for reconciliation?
- After listening to painful memories from Iranians about U.S. involvement in Iran, Jeff Carr stated, “The only way you bring about reconciliation as Christians is by repentance... but how does a nation repent?” Is repentance a task for the government, its citizens, or both? How might we participate in the process of repentance?
- The religious leaders who journeyed to Iran in February were the first to meet with a sitting president at his palace since the Islamic revolution. Based on what you’ve heard in the film, why were religious leaders able to play this role? Would a secular delegation have been similarly successful? Is this role an appropriate one for religious people to take on?

### Tips for arranging a forum

- Consider including a *Words, Not War* study session in an adult education class or a peace and social concerns committee, or include the materials as part of a sermon or presentation to a local group. You may also want to partner with a faith community other than your own.

- Consider beginning the educational process by creating a bulletin insert about Iran for your faith community’s bulletin or newsletter. You may be interested in writing an article for the newsletter using the resources provided in this study guide.
- If you would like to convene a larger forum on Iran for your faith community, contact Faithful Security at [info@faithfulsecurity.org](mailto:info@faithfulsecurity.org) for help finding an appropriate speaker.

## Reflections for Jewish Communities

*Message from Dr. Susannah Heschel:*

Speaking as a religious Jew, it is clear that language is at the center of Judaism, of Biblical faith. Language is a vehicle that God used to create the world and the vehicle of religion. Through language we have revelation from God. It’s the way we communicate to God through prayer. So language has something holy about it and it has the potential to change and soften people’s hearts. My hope is the United States can find the right kind of language, the language of diplomacy and the language of the heart, to try to avoid military conflict with Iran.

**A Jewish Prayer for Peace**

May it be your will, Eternal One, our God, God of our ancestors, that wars and bloodshed be abolished from the world, and bring into the world a great and wonderful and lasting peace. And let no nation lift up sword against nation—let them learn no more the ways of war!

It is also clear from the Bible that war is the greatest evil, and those who wage war are incapable of creating the kingdom of God. King David, for example, was forbidden by God to build the temple in Jerusalem because he was a man of war and he had bloody hands. If the United States is going to try to create an era of peace in our world, we can’t do it by waging war over and over.<sup>xvi</sup>

- In the Hebrew Scriptures we read, “The warhorse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.” (Psalm 33:17). Is this verse applicable to conflict with Iran?
- In 1982, the Central Conference of American Rabbis stated: “Our tradition speaks to us of *Sakanat Nefesh*, the danger of exposing ourselves to health hazards, *Ba’al Tashkit*, the abhorrence of willful destruction of the environment; and *Yishuv Ha’aretz*, the betterment and guardianship of the earth. Inspired by the prophets, we raise our voices to call on the United States government and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to adopt a mutual freeze on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons...”<sup>xvii</sup> Do nuclear weapons continue to pose the same threat as they did in 1982? Might an updated version of the statement be feasible today?

## Reflections for Muslim Communities

*From Louay Safi, Ph.D. of the Islamic Society of North America:*

Many Americans, and many Muslim Americans, are alarmed that the administration appears willing to repeat the mistakes of the Iraq war.

The administration's current approach to the Middle East, which relies heavily on military threats and strikes, is morally wrong, as it is counterproductive. It has undermined U.S. moral and political authority, while failing to achieve intended goals. The Iraq war has already demonstrated that relying on military power is wrong.

We believe that preventing further destabilization in the Middle East requires being fair and consistent, and using one set of standards in dealing with the various countries of the Middle East, including Iran and Israel. We cannot maintain credibility and effectiveness if we continue to insist that Iran is not allowed to develop the capacity to produce nuclear energy for peaceful use, while turning our face the other way when dealing with Israel's nuclear arsenal.<sup>xviii</sup>

- Nuclear weapons represent a serious threat to peace, while peace is the central theme of Islam. They violate the Quranic description of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as "mercy to all the worlds," and are contrary to Islam's promotion of human fellowship. The use of nuclear weapons is considered *harâm* (forbidden) under the *sharî`ah* (law) of Allah. According to the principles of Islamic law, there should be a universal ban on their development and possession. No criteria exist that allow some states to maintain nuclear weapons while other states are denied them.<sup>xix</sup>
- Many Americans are unaware that Ayatollah Khamanei has issued a fatwa saying that it is against the Quran for Muslims to build, stockpile, or use nuclear weapons. Do you see any opportunities to educate Americans about the teachings of the Quran in reference to nuclear weapons?

### Muslim Prayer for Peace

In the name of Allah,  
the beneficent, the merciful.  
Praise be to the Lord of the Universe  
who has created us and made us into  
tribes and nations  
that we may know each other, not  
that we may despise each other.  
If the enemy incline towards peace,  
do thou also incline towards peace,  
and trust God, for the Lord is the one  
that heareth and knoweth all things.  
And the servants of God, most  
gracious are those who walk on the  
Earth in humility, and when we  
address them, we say "PEACE."

## Reflections for Christian Communities

*Message from Jeff Carr, who represented Sojourners/Call to Renewal in the delegation to Iran:*

While in Iran, I was particularly fascinated by how well Muslim religious leaders understood Christianity. They quoted liberally from the Bible and made many links to corresponding verses from the Quran.

One of the leaders said that he had read the Bible from cover to cover 10 to 20 times in the course of his study, but he wondered if any of us had ever read the entire Quran. It was a fair question, and one that actually made me feel somewhat guilty. As I began to think about the primacy of the role of religion in Iran, and how much of their nation's value system comes out of the Quran, I began to think about whether or not you can truly understand a people if you have not read their holy book. Could people truly know me as a person, and understand me, if they had no real knowledge of the Bible?

These conversations, as well as many others, also made it clear that the Iranians are very interested in being respected, but feel like they have not received much respect from the West. Everyone we talked to has expressed this pain and frustration, and yet they were so gracious, and continued to want to reach out and build bridges with us, in spite of feeling disrespected. It's a value I think we as Christians in America could learn from our Islamic brothers and sisters in Iran, and it's a value that would go a long way in helping us solve some of the differences between our nations.<sup>xx</sup>

- One potential way to reconcile the two narratives between the U.S. and Iran is to open up a space for dialogue between Christians and Muslims. A new program, the Muslim-Christian Initiative on the Nuclear Weapons Danger, offers suggestions for doing so. Visit [www.mci-nwd.org](http://www.mci-nwd.org) to learn more.
- Speaking honestly about past hurts is a solid path toward reconciliation. How could your faith community partner with Iranians and Iranian-Americans to build bridges and begin the process?

### Christian Prayer for Peace

Merciful God, in your gracious presence we confess our sin and the sin of this world. You show us the way to peace in Jesus; you call us to love one another, but we are a people divided against each other in our pursuits of power, control, and security. We stray from your intentions. Neighbor turns against neighbor in anger. Nation clashes against nation in war. We abuse your gifts of imagination and freedom, of intellect and reason, and have turned them into bonds of oppression. Lord, have mercy on us, heal and forgive us. Touch our minds and fill our hearts with the power of your creative grace. Lead us in the ways of justice, peace, and reconciling love. In Jesus Christ we pray.

*From the Reformed Church of America*

## Appendix A

### *Words, Not War, With Iran*

“Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”  
(*Isaiah 2:4*)

As violence continues to rage in Iraq, and now in Lebanon and Gaza, a new confrontation is looming with neighboring Iran. Talk has increased of possible military attack against Iran to halt its nuclear program and support for Hezbollah. While we agree Iran should not support terrorism or obtain nuclear weapons, we come together as religious leaders to urge that the U.S. engage in direct negotiations with Iran as an alternative to military action in resolving the crisis.

We are encouraged that the U.S. government is cooperating with European countries and international agencies. While we welcome the U.S. willingness to join multilateral talks with Iran, we believe that a strategy of direct U.S. diplomatic engagement with Iran without preconditions is the surest means of reducing the nuclear danger and enhancing security in the region. The United States should negotiate with Iran on a mutually acceptable settlement of the nuclear standoff while making it clear that Americans absolutely reject anti-Semitism and threats against Israel. In response to the real threat of Iran’s nuclear ambitions, strategic combinations of pressures and incentives must be seriously and persistently tried, beginning with direct negotiations.

U.S. negotiations with Iran could also help resolve the crisis in Iraq. The U.S. should seek Iran’s support for international efforts to rebuild and stabilize Iraq, in conjunction with an orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops, the removal of foreign military bases, and the renouncing of any proprietary American claims on Iraqi oil and reconstruction contracts.

As Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious leaders, we are deeply concerned about the nuclear weapons danger in Iran, in the Middle East, and around the world. The teachings of the Abrahamic tradition command us to keep human life sacred and to act as stewards of creation. We consider all weapons of mass destruction—whether nuclear, biological or chemical—immoral and unacceptable for use in any circumstances. In pursuit of that principle, we strongly support international diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

Our nation and the international community must pursue this goal without using military force for at least two reasons:

- First, short of full-scale war and complete occupation of Iran, military action will not remove Iran’s potential nuclear threat; indeed, it would likely intensify Iran’s goal of acquiring nuclear weapons.
- Second, another American-led war or military attack in the Middle East would likely prove disastrous. To initiate another war in an area of the world already engulfed in turmoil and human tragedy would intensify political extremism throughout the Middle East and beyond. It would add fuel to the fires of violence already consuming the region. It would exacerbate anti-American hatred and produce new recruits for terror attacks against the United States and Israel. Significant military opinion says it would not work. Responsible theological evaluation suggests it would not be morally or strategically justified.

Nuclear nonproliferation objectives in Iran should also be linked to broader denuclearization goals, including the creation of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction. We believe that the U.S. and other nuclear weapons states would be in a stronger position to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons if they took the necessary steps toward eliminating their own nuclear arsenals—which our signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty commits us to but is a promise yet to be fulfilled.

Our scriptures call us to avoid war and to live as peaceably as possible with all. They teach us always to seek better ways to resolve our problems and conflicts.

- In the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, we read: “There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm” (Hadith 32) and in the Quran 2:60, “Do no evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth.”
- In the Hebrew Scriptures we read, “The warhorse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.” (Psalms 33:17).
- And in the Christian gospel, we hear, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

We reaffirm our religious hope for a world in which “nation shall not lift up sword against nation.” We pray that our government will be guided by moral principles, political wisdom, and international legal standards and will step back from seeing military action as an option in this crisis. We call on all our religious leaders, theologians, clergy, and laypersons to speak out against the option of war with Iran.

To attack Iran militarily would confuse noble ends (preventing Iran from supporting terrorism and developing nuclear weapons) with dangerous and irresponsible means. Especially given the continuing tragedy and chaos of Iraq, we must not make that mistake again. The moral wisdom of many religious leaders and the pragmatic warnings of many military leaders now offer a common message —WORDS, NOT WAR, WITH IRAN.

September 2006

**To view a full list of initiating signers, or to endorse the statement, please visit  
[www.wordsnotwar.org](http://www.wordsnotwar.org).**

## Appendix B

### *U.S. Religious Delegation Finds Hope in Iran, February 25, 2007*

As Christian leaders from the United States, we traveled to the Islamic Republic of Iran at this time of increased tension believing that it is possible to build bridges of understanding between our two countries. We believe military action is not the answer, and that God calls us to just and peaceful relationships within the global community.

We are a diverse group of Christian leaders from United Methodist, Episcopal, Catholic, Baptist, Evangelical, Quaker, and Mennonite traditions. The Mennonites have 17 years of on-the-ground experience in Iran. We were warmly welcomed by the Iranian people, and our time in Iran convinced us that religious leaders from both countries can help pave the way for mutual respect and peaceful relations between our nations.

During our visit we met with Muslim and Christian leaders, government officials, and other Iranian people.

Our final day included a meeting with former President Khatami and current President Ahmadinejad. The meeting with President Ahmadinejad was the first time an American delegation had met in Iran with an Iranian president since the Islamic revolution in 1979. The meeting lasted two and a half hours and covered a range of topics, including the role of religion in transforming conflict, Iraq, nuclear proliferation, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

What the delegation found most encouraging from the meeting with President Ahmadinejad was a clear declaration from him that Iran has no intention to acquire or use nuclear weapons, as well as a statement that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be solved through political, not military means. He said, "I have no reservation about conducting talks with American officials if we see some goodwill."

We believe it is possible for further dialogue and that there can be a new day in U.S.—Iranian relations. The Iranian government has already built a bridge toward the American people by inviting our delegation to come to Iran. We ask the U.S. government to welcome a similar delegation of Iranian religious leaders to the United States.

As additional steps in building bridges between our nations, we call upon both the U.S. and Iranian governments to:

- immediately engage in direct, face-to-face talks;
- cease using language that defines the other using "enemy" images; and
- promote more people-to-people exchanges including religious leaders, members of Parliament/Congress, and civil society.

As people of faith, we are committed to working toward these and other confidence-building measures, which we hope will move our two nations from the precipice of war to a more just and peaceful relationship.

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Washington Office

Jeff Carr  
Chief Operating Officer, Sojourners/Call to  
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Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

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James Winkler  
General Secretary of the General Board of  
Church & Society (GBCS),  
The United Methodist Church

## Notes and Additional Resources

To learn more about the conflict between the U.S. and Iran, please visit the *Words, Not War* Web site at [www.wordsnotwar.org](http://www.wordsnotwar.org). Many of the organizations participating in the February 2007 ecumenical delegation to Iran have additional information available on their Web sites:

### Co-sponsors:

#### American Friends Service Committee:

[www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)

#### Mennonite Central Committee:

[www.mcc.org/iran](http://www.mcc.org/iran)

### Participating Organizations:

#### The Episcopal Church:

[www.ecusa.anglican.org](http://www.ecusa.anglican.org)

#### The Friends Committee on National

Legislation: [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org)

#### General Board of Church and Society, The

United Methodist Church: [www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org)

Pax Christi USA: [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org)

#### National Council of Churches:

[www.ncccusa.org](http://www.ncccusa.org)

Sojourners/Call to Renewal: [www.sojo.net](http://www.sojo.net)

This toolkit is a project of Sojourners/Call to Renewal and Faithful Security.

[www.sojo.net](http://www.sojo.net)

[www.faithfulsecurity.org](http://www.faithfulsecurity.org)

Please feel free to distribute this toolkit or any of the materials therein as you see fit. Contact us at [info@faithfulsecurity.org](mailto:info@faithfulsecurity.org) to share your stories of how this material has been helpful to you, and what activities have stemmed from it.

### NOTES

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