

THE ISRAEL PROJECT

**CONFERENCE CALL:
SECURITY ISSUES RELATING TO IRAN PRIOR TO THE UNITED
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**WELCOME AND MODERATOR:
ALAN ELSNER,
SENIOR DIRECTOR, COMMUNICATIONS, RESEARCH AND MEDIA
RELATIONS, THE ISRAEL PROJECT**

**SPEAKER:
ILAN BERMAN,
VICE PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY COUNCIL**

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2010
11:00 A.M.**

*Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

ALAN ELSNER: Good morning and welcome. On behalf of The Israel Project, this is Alan Elsner, the senior communications director.

Our guest today is Ilan Berman, vice president of the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington, D.C. He's an expert on regional security in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Russian Federation, and has consulted for both the CIA and the U.S. Department of Defense, and provided assistance on foreign policy and national security issues to a range of government agencies and Congressional offices.

Mr. Berman is also adjunct professor for international law and global security at the National Defense University, and a member of the Associated Faculty at Missouri State University's Department of Defense and Strategic Studies. He also serves as a member of the reconstituted Committee on the Present Danger. He's a columnist for Forbes.com and an editor of the Journal of International Security Affairs.

Our subject today is Iran. The Iranian president, Ahmadinejad, is already in New York preparing for his speech to the U.N. General Assembly on Thursday, and he gave a fairly wide-ranging interview to Christiane Amanpour of ABC yesterday. I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Berman now for an introduction, after which we will get to your questions.

Mr. Berman.

ILAN BERMAN: Well, thank you very much, and I appreciate very much the invitation to be here. Let me just start by offering a few words about, sort of, where Iran is geopolitically that hopefully will inform what the objectives are of the Iranian leadership over the coming week.

Iran is in a moment that they perceive as a moment of great crisis and great opportunity. On the one hand, technologically speaking, their nuclear program is very mature and it's moving along very quickly. And what you see, sort of, with regard to new revelations about Iranian nuclear facilities, and about new nuclear cooperation—for example, between the Iranians and the Russians, suggests that this program is very much alive and kicking. It's a program that is beginning to bear fruit for the Iranian leadership, certainty in political terms.

On the other hand, Iran has been – I think it's fair to say, has been a bit surprised by the breadth and the speed of international sanctions that have materialized since three months ago, and it's very important for the Iranian leadership to demonstrate to its constituents – and it does have constituents, that it is proceeding along the course of its strategic development, of its rise to regional greatness.

These constituents, interestingly enough, are not necessarily inside the country. Iran is very much riven by internal divisions and there are new signs every day that there are – there's a jockeying for power taking place between certain factions of the conservative leadership, pitting former President Rafsanjani, for example, against current President Ahmadinejad, and with the supreme leader stuck in the middle.

But these constituents, when it comes to the General Assembly, to the international community, are much more in the third-world. Ahmadinejad has used his bully pulpit at the General Assembly for the last several years to promote a very consistent theme, a theme of a new world order that isn't dominated by the United States, one in which Iran is a natural leader, and in which countries like Venezuela, Brazil, Turkey, others, join with Iran to create a truly multipolar world.

This is a very populist message. It's not an Islamist message. It very much taps into the Bolivarian sentiment that goes on in Latin America and elsewhere. But the idea here is that Iran is trying politically to break the monopoly that the United States has – perceived monopoly that the United States has and that Europe has on the discussion over its nuclear program and over its position in the Middle East.

And so the Iranian leadership views the coming days as a very important opportunity to do that – to demonstrate to the world that they're defiant; they're unbowed by international sanctions; to put on a brave face and minimize the impact those sanctions are having; and by doing so, to highlight the appeal that their alternative way of international politics has for these other countries – aspiring weapons states or second- and third-world countries.

MR. ELSNER: Thank you.

The first question, which actually springs naturally from your introduction, is: You say the nuclear program is moving along very quickly; how far away are they in your estimation from developing a viable nuclear weapon?

MR. BERMAN: Well, I think this is the \$64,000 question. I'm not a betting man anymore because I have small children and very little disposable income. But if I was, I would still be very hesitant to hazard a guess.

I would say this, that the mechanics of creating the capability to build a weapon are fairly straightforward: You need to enrich uranium from zero percent enrichment. Naturally occurring uranium can be enriched to between 4 and 7 percent; and that's low-enriched – that's considered low-enriched uranium, uranium that's suitable for reactors. And then that same uranium can be enriched further, to between 85 and 90 percent, which makes it weapons usable.

So in a very, sort of, very, very basic way, the current Iranian nuclear program is dual use. If you presume the benign version of events that Iran would have us believe, then the program is intended for civilian energy generation. But all the tell-tale signs – including signs that they have facilities that are enriching beyond 7 percent to 20 percent, perhaps as much as 60 percent, suggests that Iran is using the civilian program as a leap-ahead technology so that they can have the raw material and the potential to build a weapon.

Whether or not they're actually going to go ahead and build a weapon and test it or use it is a different story entirely. But I think it's troubling enough that this is a regime which is, I think, a very irresponsible international actor on many fronts, and it's acquiring the potential to have a nuclear weapon. A lot of the Iranian development that you can see currently simply can't

be excused away as part of work on a peaceful nuclear program. Iran is very far out of the gate on a number of projects that suggest very clearly that they have – (inaudible) – weapons applications.

And as a result, we worry. And we also worry because that question is, frankly, unknowable to a large extent. We don't know how quickly Iran can take that material – the weapons-usable material and miniaturize and weaponize, and how it would do so. Would it build a bomb? Would it build a warhead that they would put on a missile? There's a lot of, what they call, "unknown unknowns," but the signs are, I think, very ominous.

MR. ELSNER: Thank you for that.

A follow-up to that: If we don't know how far Iran is exactly from a nuclear weapon, what do you believe the Israelis and the U.S. administration thinks about that question? How far away do they think the Iranians are from a weapon?

MR. BERMAN: Well, it's a good question. And I think a lot of the discussion, certainly in technical circles in the United States, has to do with the timeline – the timelines it would take for Iran to take highly-enriched raw material and, sort of, make a uranium implosion device; how long it would take for Iranian to miniaturize that warhead to make it suitable for its Shahab medium-range missiles, et cetera, et cetera.

But I think, you know, what we've seen over the last several years has been a very, very clear narrowing of the timetable. Iran can be anticipated to be weapons-capable by, I think, as early as – I've seen some estimates that say as early as the spring, perhaps a little bit later. But I would make the argument almost that the actual moment at which Iran becomes a nuclear power is not as important as the regional perceptions of the same process. Because, what you're beginning to see in the region is a new arms race, (and ?) a nuclear arms race, as countries in the region begin to arm themselves in anticipation of the emergence of a nuclear Iran. So in a very real sense, the timeline is a little bit of a sliding scale because countries are already beginning to treat Iran and react to Iran as if it's a nuclear power.

MR. ELSNER: Do you think the Israelis and the Americans are actually on the same page in estimating these timelines?

MR. BERMAN: You know, I think the – a few years ago, I would – the answer I would have given would be no. In fact, the Israelis, sort of, very consistently gave, I would say, more near-term projections than the intelligence community did. But I think as Iran progresses along this track, and more and more empirical evidence of Iranian progress is seen, I think those differences become less pronounced.

I think there is a – there's a saying that former CIA Director Jim Woolsey always likes to use, that "it's close enough (for government work" ?). I think the Israeli and the U.S. estimates are now close enough together to be close enough (for government work ?).

MR. ELSNER: Okay, and another question: The Obama administration has consistently said that all options are on the table. But realistically, given the unpopularity of the war in Afghanistan and the way the war in Iraq turned out, do you think there is a viable U.S. military option that the Obama administration would use?

MR. BERMAN: Well, frankly, no. And I'll sort of explain what I mean.

About three weeks ago – three-and-a-half weeks ago, the new U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Jim Jeffrey, arrived in Baghdad, and he gave his inaugural press conference to reporters. And he made a really interesting statement that not a lot of people picked up on. The statement was that, by his estimates – after having received a briefing and having, sort of, had the intelligence background, backgrounders that he got before coming in-country – he estimates that Iran is responsible for a quarter or more, responsible directly or indirectly, a quarter or more of all the Coalition casualties that have taken place to date in Iraq.

Now, that's an astounding statistic. And if you take it out of the politics of Iraq, out of the politics of Afghanistan, out of the politics of Iran, the natural question would be: Why are we not at war with this country? But the reality is that, you know, Iran has managed to wage this war of attrition, and sort of allowed – the Coalition, over time, has sort of absorbed the consequences and the implications of Iranian misbehavior, to such an extent that it's almost impossible these days to imagine a scenario where Iran acts so provocatively that it creates a – (inaudible) – for the United States.

It's possible, of course, that Iran will misjudge a certain situation, or there will be some sort of incident at sea, or something else. But, barring those, it's unclear to me that there is a strategic case for military action against Iran. And if there isn't a strategic case for military action against Iran, then the conversation becomes purely a political one: Essentially, does the American leadership – does it have the political will and does it have the popular support to wage military action against Iran, unilaterally or in coalition form, but to do so with its striking the first blow?

And I think, looking at all the polling statistics – and The Israel Project, I think is very good at, is very good source for acquiring those statistics – I'm simply not confident that there really is an American military option.

MR. ELSNER: There was a fascinating article in the Atlantic Monthly by Jeffrey Goldberg, which no doubt you read carefully, which weighed the possibility of the Israeli military action and looked at how that might happen. What's your estimation then, if the Americans are not (going to ?) act militarily, of the possibility that the Israelis would? And when might this happen?

MR. BERMAN: Well, again, as I said, I'm not a betting man. But I would have to say that from everything I've seen, from everything I know of the Israeli mind-set – and, incidentally, I think it's a little bit simplistic to say that Israelis uniformly support military action against Iran. This is a minority faction, certainly among folks in the defense ministry, including, for example, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who believe that dealing with a nuclear Iran can be a

defensive measure, so Israel can erect proper, requisite defenses, such as the Arrow, such as David's Sling, Iron Dome, and other systems that will allow it to effectively neutralize any threat from Iran without having to go bomb Iranian sites.

But I think the majority sentiment, at least as I'm understanding it, the majority sentiment still views a nuclear Iran – Iran in possession of nuclear weapons, as an existential threat, and one that necessitates some sort of action. And the timeline on this I think is very unclear. But I would have to say that, in these calculations, time works against the attacker, in the sense that the longer Iran has to acquire sophisticated anti-aircraft technology, for example – the S-300 from Russia, or the S-300 not directly from Russia, but from other consumers that then pass it along – the more complicated and difficult it becomes for Israel to actually effectuate a strike that will achieve its objectives.

And, incidentally, the Israeli objectives are very, very limited. Israel never talks about destruction; it only talks about delay. That is a function, A, of the scope of the Iranian nuclear program. Israel simply doesn't have the planes or the munitions to get rid of the 36 to 48 nuclear sites or nuclear-related sites that Iran has scattered around the country. And it's also, I think, a recognition that Israel's job is not to make – render Iran a nonnuclear state. The nuclear program in Iraq will emerge. The Israeli goal, as I understand it, is to delay it, hopefully for a decade or more, but perhaps even just for a few years, and, in doing so, buy time for other dynamics, such as internal transformation, to take hold. This is a delaying tactic. This is a stall tactic. This isn't a strategy.

MR. ELSNER: Do you believe that the United States is putting very heavy pressure on Israel to prevent such an attack?

MR. BERMAN: Well, I think yes and no. I think, certainly, over the last year we've seen a real chill in U.S.-Israeli relations on a number of issues, including, for example, the candidness with which Israeli officials could come to town and talk about Iran and the threat from Iran.

And I think that pall has begun to lift a little bit. And I attribute that, I think, to a large extent to, first of all, movement on the Israeli-Palestinian track – even though those two things are unrelated as far as I can tell, but also to the fact that there is growing consensus about the severity and the timing of the Iranian threat between the U.S. and the Israeli intelligence agencies.

This doesn't mean that Israel has a green light to attack from the United States. If you recall, the Iraq – the Israeli raid on the Osirak reactor in Iraq in the early '80s was greeted, at least publicly, with condemnation from the United States. It was, though, applauded privately. And I think what Israel is experiencing is a little bit of that schizophrenia again.

There are many people in town who would like very much to see Israel take the lead, even though they can't articulate that publicly or in their public capacities. And there's a lot of countries and leaders in the region, certainly in the Gulf States, that have as much or more fear

and loathing of Iran as Israel does, and they also are sending quiet signals that an Israeli military action would be – certainly would be welcome, at least on a track-two level, if not publicly.

MR. ELSNER: When President Ahmadinejad denies the Holocaust, and when he states that his aim is to destroy Israel, how seriously do you think that should be taken?

MR. BERMAN: I think that's actually an excellent question, because the – Ahmadinejad, I like to say, is the gift that keeps on giving. He's someone who is very plainspoken in his radicalism, and so has managed to alter international perceptions of Iran, and highlight the threat – or potential threat from Iran in a way that simply wasn't possible before.

But he is not in charge, or at least not fully in charge. Iran is just sort of, by way of a primer, has two militaries, and neither of them are controlled by the Iranian president. They're both controlled by the supreme leader, because, the clerical leadership overlays the tricameral structure of government that Iran has. It has a – (inaudible) – republic.

The unelected clerical leaders are the ones that you need to watch for. The supreme leader is called the “supreme leader” for a reason, and his decisionmaking, at least for the moment, is paramount. That doesn't mean the president is without power. It doesn't mean that his radical rhetoric does not have an effect. But the finger on the trigger isn't his; it's that of the supreme leader.

But, and this is an important “but,” I think it's important to understand that our calculation about whether or not Iran is – who's in charge in Iran, and whether or not Iran is a rational state, is intimately related. We, in many cases, attempt to mirror-image the Cold War and (the, sort of, ?) the mutually-assured destruction paradigm that emerged between the U.S. and the USSR, and assume that everything's going to be okay as soon as Iran acquires a nuclear capability. The, sort of, the basic logic is that we managed to deter the Soviets when they had nukes – we had nukes, they had nukes, and war was unthinkable, and, therefore, mutually-assured destruction will essentially kick in when Iran acquires a nuke, and we don't have to do anything at all.

I think, frankly, that's – that reasoning is specious, and specious because this type of jockeying for political position that you're seeing within Iran has enormous consequences. The supreme leader is the supreme leader for the moment. But it doesn't mean that the system is unitary and it doesn't mean that there aren't people who also have political power. And by assuming that you can successfully deter Iran under any combination of circumstances in the future suggests that you have a pretty good handle on who's in charge in Iran and who will be into the future. And I frankly don't think that our intelligence community, or any other intelligence community that I can think of, should have that kind of confidence.

MR. ELSNER: A question here from Bloomberg News. What is expected from the meeting E3+3 ministry meeting on Wednesday?

MR. BERMAN: Well, I think, frankly, there's going to be two big conversations that are happening. One is going to be driven by the United States and by Europe, and the other's going to be driven by Iran.

The U.S.-European conversation is about how to provide greater oversight of, and increase the effectiveness of, the current sanctions regimes. And there's two: There's the multilateral regime, which is now in its fourth round of sanctions, as per U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929, which was passed in June; and there is the U.S. unilateral track, which is pursuant to the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Act, which was passed a few days after the U.N. resolution.

The U.S. is sort of in an important position, in the sense that it needs to convince fellow members of the GA that it's serious about enforcing sanctions – its own sanctions, in the sense that if you're a country and you trade with Iran, you will be constrained in some way from trading with the United States. We haven't really done so, so far. It's been a bipartisan failure of government. Republicans and Democrats alike tend to prioritize bilateral trade over international security when it comes to the application of sanctions. So the Obama administration has a very important moment in trying to hammer home that it's serious about exacting penalties this time.

On the multilateral track, Europe, I think, put a very strong foot forward when the European Union had to come to a decision as to what level of sanctions it will apply on Iran, which it did a couple of months ago. And the results were, I think, frankly, very optimistic. Europe has imposed a fairly biting package of sanctions on Iran and restricted its trade considerably. It doesn't mean that Europe doesn't trade with Iran, but it means that there is pressure being exerted on Europe – on Iran by Europe, and the European Union, and certainly the P-5+1 group is very interested in making sure that that pressure continues, and if possible even to amplify.

MR. ELSNER: You said in your introduction that Iran was surprised by the breadth and speed of these sanctions. What effect are they actually having on, A, daily life in Iran; and, B, the development of the nuclear program?

MR. BERMAN: Well, those are – those are I think very important metrics, because Iran – I do believe Iran was surprised by the breadth and speed, because the experience that it was drawing from historically has been that the United Nations Security Council passes a resolution and the global community yawns, in general. It's essentially “business as usual” with regard to Iran.

But since June there's been a very substantial constriction of trade with Iran – from countries that you would expect, for example, in the European Union, and also from countries that you wouldn't expect, Turkey, although that's reversing a little bit now, South Korea, others. And so the coalition that the international community has managed to put together to squeeze Iran is broader and more effective than the Iranians assumed it would be. I think that's a pretty fair statement to say.

Now, what actual, tangible effect it's having is a little bit of a murkier subject. Iran is clearly beginning to feel the pinch in its capacity to continue its import of refined petroleum from abroad. Iran is a major gasoline importer. It has tremendous oil reserves, but it lacks refining capacity – at least for the moment. And so one very important metric is: How much gasoline is Iran able to import – to continue to import, and how much is it costing the Iranian regime?

And if you look at those two numbers, what you'll see is that gasoline imports over the last three months have constricted pretty considerably, on the order of 50 percent. So Iran is having more trouble acquiring refined petroleum from abroad, and Iran is probably paying – and I would have to look at the numbers, but I think it's a fair bet to say that they're paying more for gasoline than they were before the sanctions. Now, whether or not that's enough of an economic lever to really convince the Iranian regime that a nuclear program – that the costs of a nuclear program outweigh the benefits remains to be seen.

What you're seeing inside Iran, incidentally – this, sort of, sustained unrest that stemmed from last summer's fraudulent re-election of Ahmadinejad to the presidency, which morphed into the Green Movement, this is unrelated. And I think that's important to highlight. This is unrelated (to things ?). It can be amplified by sanctions, but the causes are unrelated. The causes have to do with the, sort of, the endemic socioeconomic failures that are inherent in the Islamic republic.

It doesn't mean that you can't make those protests sharper, that you can't highlight economic inefficiencies by making it harder for the regime to acquire materials such as gasoline from abroad. But for the moment, one of the things that I'm concerned about is that economic sanctions don't have a very clear end-state with regard to what they want Iran to do. It's clear that the gasoline sanctions – sanctions generally – are intended to pressure Iran over its nuclear program, but the administration has been very, very opaque about what it would take to turn the sanctions off.

And I think that's an important question, because if the goal here is to sit back down at the table with the Iranians – after they are properly chastened and squeezed economically, it's very important for them to know what they have to do in order to find a roadmap out of these sanctions.

MR. ELSNER: David Ignatius, The Washington Post columnist, had a column on Saturday in which he talked about positive signals from Iran to the United States on cooperating in pacifying Afghanistan. How seriously do you take this?

MR. BERMAN: Not very.

And it's interesting. I mean, if the – if your desired goal is cooperation with Iran above all, then you'll sort of grasp at any straw. I mean, I think there is a legitimate field of cooperation with regard to Afghanistan, because, for example, Iran has, according to the United Nations, the highest drug addiction rate in the world, and a lot of that comes from the fact that it is next door to Afghanistan and is a primary recipient of opium from Afghanistan.

So it's clear that the Iranians are seized of the issue. But you have to balance that, and that potential cooperation, against what they're doing in Afghanistan, which is essentially a replica of what they're doing in Iraq – this idea of a proxy war that's being waged against the Coalition. Because, an unstable Afghanistan, or an Afghanistan in which the central government doesn't have full control over its provinces, creates a tremendous amount of strategic (depth ?) for the Iranians that they are likely to exploit. They would like that strategic (depth ?) so that they don't have the Coalition on its borders.

So I think, for the Iranians, there may be some area for cooperation, to be sure. But I think, for them, the sort of the strategic – this idea, the strategic interest, the idea of creating (depth ?), the idea of keeping the Coalition off balance probably trumps those considerations.

MR. ELSNER: We're coming toward the end of our conversation with Ilan Berman and just a couple of more questions.

Russia signed on to the latest round of sanctions, but it has done various things since then, seemingly, to advance the Iranian nuclear program. How do you explain that? Is Russia in compliance with the sanctions? Are they playing a double game?

MR. BERMAN: Well, the Russians, a friend said long ago – and I, sort of, I pilfer his line mercilessly, but the Russians are experts at creating a problem and then positing themselves as the solution to that problem. And I think this is what's happening here.

In 2007, the – I mean, the Russian-Iranian cooperation goes back to the late 1980s. It really kicked in with the dissolution of the Soviet Union when the Russian government was looking for, for example, for clients for its defense industry; Iran was looking to reconstitute its military after the Iran-Iraq war. So there's – there's very much a marriage of convenience there. But over time it became something more.

And the Iranians are – they hold a very important trump card, which is their ability to stir up trouble in what Russia calls its “soft underbelly” in the majority-Muslim states of Central Asia. And they also control – and geographically they're much closer to Russia, and so even the Russians are very cognizant of the fact that Iran could potentially pose a strategic threat to them.

So the cooperation that goes on has to have considerable merit in order to warrant Kremlin support even though Iran poses such a clear threat to them. And what I think the Russians are – and this is sort of, I think, best viewed from the context of Russian internal politics, Russia tends to see, like Iran does, a tremendous amount of merit in a multipolar world, a world where the United States is involved in various conflicts and therefore cannot turn its attention to a superpower rivalry. So in this context Iran plays a very important role.

Russians tend to see Iran as a natural leader in the Middle East – in the greater Middle East region, and they know that a rising Iran will complicate American policy in the Middle East, and, therefore, prevent America from taking a robust stand on issues that the Russians care more about. For example, the sovereignty of the Caucasus, the North Caucasus – Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia; NATO expansion into Ukraine, things like that, things that are really I think

red-lines. For the Russians, those red lines are not even breached because America is so bogged down in other theaters. And Iran tends to play a very, very useful tool in that regard.

MR. ELSNER: Okay, before I ask my last question, I just want to tell our listeners that we at The Israel Project will be covering Ahmadinejad at the U.N. very comprehensively. We have a press conference with the outgoing Israeli ambassador to the U.N. on Wednesday and we will be writing and Tweeting about that. We will be Tweeting throughout Ahmadinejad's speech, so we'll be giving real-time coverage of that. And you can follow us at The Israel Project just by going to [Twitter@TheIsraelProject](https://twitter.com/TheIsraelProject), and watch also our website, TheIsraelProject.org, for real-time updates on this important issue.

I'd like to thank Dr. – Mr. Berman, but just let me ask this last question.

If we have a conference call this time next year – and I'm asking you to look into your crystal ball, something I know that you are a little reluctant to do – if we were to have this conversation this time next year, where do you think we will be? Will Iran have gone nuclear or will somebody have done something to stop it?

MR. BERMAN: Well, let me – let me sort of answer this (obliquely?). I'm a – I'm a recovering lawyer, so I always try to do this very cautiously.

But we would either be having one of two conversations, and both of them I think are suboptimal, but there are only two major ways I see this playing out. I mean, there's lots of permutations, and I'm a big fan in the idea of alternative futures, but it seems to me that what we're approaching now is a fork in the road: Where we, on the one hand, think about accommodating a nuclear Iran.

Accommodating doesn't necessarily mean "living with," in the sense that, you know, we don't have to like it. But accommodating a nuclear Iran would be, for example, a containment regime; would be assuming that there's going to be increased proliferation in the Middle East, assuming an uptick in terrorist activity. And that might be the conversation that we're having.

Alternatively, the conversation that we're having might be a conversation – a sort of an "Iraq reconstruction" conversation – "Iran reconstruction," a conversation that talks about the aftereffects of some sort of military action against Iran, where there were targets that were hit. It's unclear what the scope of that military action would be. If it's Israeli, it would probably be confined to the nuclear program. If it's for some reason American – although I don't see that as likely, it might target nonnuclear sites as well, leadership sites, for example.

And we might be looking at, sort of, the aftereffect of that: Is Iran sort of in negotiating mode? Or was the military strike not robust enough and Iran is sort of resurgent? Iran now has international support? Iran is harder to contain now because military action wasn't enough?

And I think, sort of, those are the two big conversations. I would like to be having a third conversation, which is that, you know, what we've seen in Iran is a tremendous groundswell of popular disapproval that's managed to have greater legs than what we saw last year and we're

now dealing with a more benign, more democratic, more transparent regime. I suspect, though, that that's the least likely of the three.

MR. ELSNER: Thank you very much, Ilan Berman. It's been a very illuminating conversation.

And again to our listeners, please follow us on Twitter@IsraelProject; and look at our website, TheIsraelProject.org as we cover this important event this week, President Ahmadinejad in New York speaking at the U.N. General Assembly on Thursday. Thank you and goodbye.

(END)