



[Steve Clemons](#)

[Hagel to Bush: Talk to Iran!](#)

Posted October 31, 2007 | 03:07 PM (EST)

I have just secured a private letter -- not yet publicly released -- from [Senator Chuck Hagel](#) to President Bush and copied to Condoleezza Rice, Robert Gates, and Stephen Hadley. I should add that I did not receive this letter from Senator Hagel but from other sources.

The letter urges the President to pursue "direct, unconditional, and comprehensive talks with the Government of Iran."

In the letter, both attached ([Hagel letter pdf](#)) and reprinted in full below, Hagel warns that "unless there is a strategic shift [from the current situation], I believe we will find ourselves in a dangerous and increasingly isolated position in the coming months." Hagel continues, "I do not see how the collective actions that we are now taking will produce the results that we seek."

Senator Hagel encourages President Bush to take the bold strategic step of offering a completely different course for US-Iran relations. He writes about direct unconditional talks:

An approach such as this would strengthen our ability across the board to deal with Iran. Our friends and allies would be more confident to stand with us if we seek to increase pressure, including tougher sanctions on Iran. It could create a historic new dynamic in US-Iran relations, in part forcing the Iranians to react to the possibility of better relations with the West. We should be prepared that any dialogue process with Iran will take time, and we should continue all efforts, as you have, to engage Iran from a position of strength.

We should not wait to consider the option of bilateral talks until all other diplomatic options are exhausted. At that point, it could well be too late.

This letter is a call for serious, level-headed rationality from one of the Senate's most stalwart "classic conservatives."

I have since learned that the letter somehow made its way to [US Central Command Commander William Fallon](#), perhaps through Defense Secretary Gates or other avenues,

and Fallon allegedly communicated with the Senator that serious articulations of American interests and consideration of the options Hagel recommends are much needed in this current political and policy environment.

I need to also report that while I am in complete agreement with the content of Senator Hagel's letter and had the privilege of [moderating a dinner discussion](#) with him yesterday evening, the content of this letter came via other sources to me -- and I trust the Senator and his staff will respect the fact that I felt it important to bring this letter to public attention and have not violated any trust with any person in his office.

Full Text of Letter from Senator Chuck Hagel to President George W. Bush on US-Iran Policy, 17 October 2007:

October 17, 2007

The President

The White House

Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to urge you to consider pursuing direct, unconditional and comprehensive talks with the Government of Iran.

In the last two years, the United States has worked closely with the permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany, Japan, and other key states as well as the UN Secretary General and the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency to pursue a diplomatic strategy regarding Iran's nuclear program. I have supported your efforts. Maintaining a cohesive and united international front remains one of our most effective levers on Iran.

In the last year, you have also authorized our Ambassador in Iraq, Ryan Crocker, to hold bilateral talks with Iranian officials regarding the situation in Iraq. I have also supported this effort. Although Iran has continued dangerous actions in Iraq, this channel for dialogue is important.

I am increasingly concerned, however, that this diplomatic strategy is stalling. There are growing differences with our international partners. Concerns remain that the United States' actual objectives is regime change in Iran, not a change in Iran's behavior. Prospects for further action in the UN Security Council have grown dim, and we appear increasingly reliant on a single-track effort to expand financial pressure on Iran outside of the

UN Security Council. Iran's actions, both on its nuclear program and in Iraq, are unchanged. Iran's leaders appear increasingly confident in their positions vis-a-vis the United States.

Unless there is a strategic shift, I believe we will find ourselves in a dangerous and increasingly isolated position in the coming months. I do not see how the collective actions that we are now taking will produce the results that we seek. If this continues, our ability to sustain a united international front will weaken as countries grow uncertain over our motives and unwilling to risk open confrontation with Iran, and we are left with fewer and fewer policy options.

Now is the time for the United States to active consider when and how to offer direct, unconditional, and comprehensive talks with Iran. The offer should be made even as we continue to work with our allies on financial pressure, in the UN Security Council on a third sanctions resolution, and in the region to support those Middle East countries who share our concerns with Iran. The November report by IAEA Director General ElBaradei to the IAEA Board of Governors could provide an opportunity to advance the offer of bilateral talks.

An approach such as this would strengthen our ability across the board to deal with Iran. Our friends and allies would be more confident to stand with us if we seek to increase pressure, including tougher sanctions on Iran. It could create a historic new dynamic in US-Iran relations, in part forcing the Iranians to react to the possibility of better relations with the West. We should be prepared that any dialogue process with Iran will take time, and we should continue all efforts, as you have, to engage Iran from a position of strength.

We should not wait to consider the option of bilateral talks until all other diplomatic options are exhausted. At that point, it could well be too late.

I urge you to consider pursuing direct, unconditional and comprehensive talks with the Government of Iran.

Thank you for considering my views.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Chuck H.

Chuck Hagel
United States Senator

cc: Condoleezza Rice

Robert M. Gates

Stephen J. Hadley

This is a letter benchmarking the views of one of the most grounded, foreign policy savvy, common sense thinkers about the eroding state of America's military and national security portfolio. And he's a Midwestern American Republican who served in the United States Military.

Senator Hagel will be speaking for the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) on Thursday, 8 November, at the Capital Hilton at 11 am on the subject of America's Iran policy -- and no doubt this letter that I have secured will be among the topics of discussion.

-- *Steve Clemons publishes the popular political blog, [The Washington Note](#)*

Chuck Hagel
Nebraska

United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

October 17, 2007

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to urge you to consider pursuing direct, unconditional, and comprehensive talks with the Government of Iran.

In the last two years, the United States has worked closely with the permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany, Japan, other key states as well as the UN Secretary General and the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency to pursue a diplomatic strategy regarding Iran's nuclear program. I have supported your efforts. Maintaining a cohesive and united international front remains one of our most effective levers on Iran.

In the last year, you have also authorized our Ambassador in Iraq, Ryan Crocker, to hold bilateral talks with Iranian officials regarding the situation in Iraq. I have also supported this effort. Although Iran has continued dangerous actions in Iraq, this channel for dialogue is important.

I am increasingly concerned, however, that this diplomatic strategy is stalling. There are growing differences with our international partners. Concerns remain that the United States' actual objective is regime change in Iran, not a change in Iran's behavior. Prospects for further action in the UN Security Council have grown dim, and we appear increasingly reliant on a single-track effort to expand financial pressure on Iran outside of the UN Security Council. Iran's actions, both on its nuclear program and in Iraq, are unchanged. Iran's leaders appear increasingly confident in their position vis-a-vis the United States.

Unless there is a strategic shift, I believe we will find ourselves in a dangerous and increasingly isolated position in the coming months. I do not see how the collective actions that we are now taking will produce the results that we seek. If this continues, our ability to sustain a united international front will weaken as countries grow uncertain over our motives and unwilling to risk open confrontation with Iran, and we are left with fewer and fewer policy options.

The President
October 17, 2007
Page 2

Now is the time for the United States to actively consider when and how to offer direct, unconditional, and comprehensive talks with Iran. The offer should be made even as we continue to work with our allies on financial pressure, in the UN Security Council on a third sanctions resolution, and in the region to support those Middle East countries who share our concerns with Iran. The November report by IAEA Director General ElBaradei to the IAEA Board of Governors could provide an opportunity to advance the offer of bilateral talks.

An approach such as this would strengthen our ability across the board to deal with Iran. Our friends and allies would be more confident to stand with us if we seek to increase pressure, including tougher sanctions, on Iran. It could create a historic new dynamic in U.S.-Iran relations, in part by forcing the Iranians to react to the possibility of better relations with the West. We should be prepared that any dialogue process with Iran will take time, and we should continue all efforts, as you have, to engage Iran from a position of strength.

We should not wait to consider the option of bilateral talks until all other diplomatic options are exhausted. At that point, it could well be too late.

I urge you to consider pursuing direct, unconditional, and comprehensive talks with the Government of Iran.

Thank you for considering my views.

Best wishes.



Sincerely,



Cc: Condoleezza Rice
Robert M. Gates
Stephen J. Hadley