

RELEASE IN PART B6

From Vartan Gregorian

From: Maggie Williams

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Subject: From Vartan Gregorian

FYI

Vartan wanted you to see -- this is like to be published somewhere -- thought it was pretty interesting.

An Opportunity Missed, But Not Lost: What President Bush Should Have Written to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

This February marks the 30th anniversary of the Iranian revolution. In what may yet prove to be an historical milestone of another kind, on February 10, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran appeared to reach out to the Obama administration, saying that Tehran was ready for "talks based on mutual respect and in a fair atmosphere." This possible overture in what has otherwise seemed to be an unbreachable divide between the United States and Iran during the administration of President George W. Bush reminded me that the possibility of rapprochement between our two nations arose just a few years ago, but was ignored. I am referring to the fact that in May 2006, President Ahmadinejad wrote a far-ranging, 18-page letter to President George Bush discussing religious values, history and international relations. The letter went unanswered. During Ahmadinejad's visit to the UN later that year, he expressed his deep disappointment that President Bush had not responded to his missive.

As a student of the region and of United States-Iran relations, I believed then, and I believe now, that this was a missed opportunity—one of many. Ahmadinejad's letter provided President Bush with an opportunity to address the Iranian people directly to highlight America's longstanding relationship with Iran and clarify the Bush administration's views on the U.S.-Iran relationship.

At the time, thinking about these issues, I drafted a letter that might have served as a response by President Bush to the Iranian people. I offer it here.

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Vartan Gregorian

Dear President Ahmadinejad,

Your letter and recent public utterances have prompted me to review Iran's many contributions to the world, its relationship with the United States and the outstanding issues that now confront our two countries.

Mr. President, let me begin by stating that Americans are deeply mindful and respectful of the renowned achievements and rich cultural legacy of Iranian civilization, which reflect a virtually unparalleled degree of historical continuity. We are especially cognizant of the role that religion has played in your country's development. Some 2,500 years ago, Iranians gave the world Zoroastrianism, which among its core tenets, affirmed man's absolute free will to choose between evil and a Divine Creator, and our common destiny to face a final Day of Judgment. Although manifested in many different forms, these ancient tenets have been shared by the world's great religions. They underscore the