

Continuous Regime Change from Within

Iran has been and remains the benefactor of a systematic failure of key Western policymakers to understand it. Determined to get to the root of the problem, these policymakers have tended to simplify an otherwise complex polity and reduced irritating intricacies to apparent irrelevancy. One example is the conclusion drawn by many U.S. policymakers following the debacle of the Iran-contra affair that moderate Iranian politicians simply did not exist. Far from the monolithic, totalitarian police state described by some commentators, Iran's politics reflect an intensely complex, highly plural, dynamic characteristic of a state in transition that incorporates the contradictions and instabilities inherent in such a process. Democratizing moderates confront authoritarian conservatives; a secularizing, intensely nationalistic society sits uneasily next to the sanctimonious piety of the hard-line establishment. To the casual observer, contemporary Iran often seems, and may best be described as, curiously surreal.

Far from an oriental stasis, the political upheaval of 1979 in Iran was a thoroughly modern revolution that unleashed social forces whose potential for change is now driving a process of organic democratization. This process enjoys a profound historical pedigree, ably sustained by an intellectual renaissance and driven in part by economic necessity. It is a gradual, long-term, dialectical process punctuated and defined by periods of heightened activity that is laying the foundation for a fundamental shift in Iranian political culture through a synthesis of Western and Iranian/Islamic ideas. This marriage, by which Western ideas are authenticated and legitimized for an Iranian constituency, ensures both the complexity and the dynamism of the

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process. Only if the United States understands the structure of politics in the Islamic Republic and grapples with the complexity of this continuing historical process will it be able to respond constructively to the perennial challenge that is modern Iran.

The Roots of Iranian Democratization

Iran's contemporary democrats trace their intellectual and spiritual roots to the Constitutional Revolution in 1906 when a coalition of merchants, intellectuals, and clerics, driven by the failures of the Iranian state in the face of European encroachment and influenced by Western ideas, forced the shah at that time to concede to constitutional limitations on his powers and to the establishment of a parliament (Majlis). Although this dramatic achievement established the blueprint for subsequent movements, its narrow social base and irrelevancy to the majority of ordinary Iranians, for whom ideas of constitutional democracy were as yet alien, along with its lack of a cohesive plan for reform ensured that in practical terms the movement steadily collapsed, inaugurating a period of political stagnancy and ultimately autocracy that would last until 1941.

Although this specific political effort failed, the Constitutional Movement's effect on Iran's political culture has been profound; it has proved an enduring point of reference, largely because the participants published copious literary memoirs and musings to keep the movement alive. That the successes and failures of this early-twentieth-century movement are referenced and debated to this day reminds us that history is very much alive in contemporary Iran and still weighs heavily on the actions of contemporary politicians. Contemporary reformers trace their spiritual and intellectual lineage to this event, identifying themselves with a movement that extends beyond the chronological confines of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and contributing to the current political tensions.¹

This sense of intellectual inheritance is more pronounced when one reviews the next great leap forward in popular political consciousness in Iran—the Oil Nationalization Movement (1951–1953). The growth of education, technology, and the liberalization of political activity following the Allied occupation of Iran (1941–1946) helped develop a new level of political awareness. Industry encouraged the emergence of an urban proletariat whose ideological convictions were buttressed by Soviet propaganda, forcing traditional politicians to turn to the street for support. Popular nationalism would not only deflect the threat of communism but also would facilitate authentic modernization through the nationalization of Iranian assets and the expulsion of foreign interests, most obviously the vast Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. This

need to make nationalism truly popular ensured that politics adopted a new vocabulary rich with religious overtones familiar to the masses, whose medium of popular communication remained rich in religious metaphor.

Not surprisingly, the key to this mobilization lay with the masters of religious rhetoric, the clerical classes, or *ulema*, who understood how to communicate with the people. Secular nationalism thus appropriated an Islamic hue in an effort to self-promote. When the nationalist prime minister, Dr. Muhammad Mossadegh, challenged British control over Iranian oil assets, he not only drew on left-wing support, but also depended crucially on the continuing support of Ayatollah Abul Qassem Kashani, the epitome of the religious nationalist. Only when Kashani, along with some other important nationalists, withdrew that support did Mossadegh's government become vulnerable and ultimately succumb to a coup in 1953 that restored royal autocracy to Iran, this time with U.S. tutelage and support.

Contemporary reformers trace their spiritual and intellectual lineage to 1906, not 1979.

Central as the 1953 coup was to the demise of the Mossadegh government and the National Front, the real internal political problems that plagued that government have been conveniently disguised by the historically revisionist elevation of the Mossadegh government to mythic status in Iranian political folklore. Indeed, the specter of Mossadegh and a reactionary coup continue to loom large in the Iranian political consciousness today, with the picture of this tragic nationalist politician (arguably the author of his own misfortune) and the symbolism he conveys adorning many a student rally. Emotional content aside, the fact that yet another "democratic" experiment in Iran resulted in dictatorship is not lost on contemporary Iranian politicians, including and perhaps most importantly President Muhammad Khatami himself.

These democratic failures are ascribed to a lack of popular cohesion or unity of purpose and, as far as Khatami is concerned, the problems inherent in seeking extraconstitutional methods to achieve constitutional goals, as well as the difficulties of leading the public once mobilized. At the same time, valuable lessons can be learned from the Mossadegh experience. Properly utilized, mass mobilization is possible and was an effective political tool, and although essentially urban based in a majority rural country and elite driven, the National Front coalition did succeed in evicting the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and, by extension, the British from Iranian politics. Because the 1953 coup soon returned official power to the shah, the National Front's victory proved incomplete but not insubstantial, especially since

their efforts signaled the end of British dominance in the Middle East. Another important lesson for aspiring revolutionaries today was that religion—in this case communicated through Shi'a myths—needed to sanctify Iranian nationalism for it to become a truly political force.

The significant role of religion in Iranian nationalism and political mobilization more generally became even more evident in the aftermath of the shah's return and the repression of the secular National Front and left-wing groups. A renewed and vigorous identification of Shi'ism with Iranian nationalism was defined in opposition to a growing antagonism with the United States that emerged following the 1953 coup, allegedly organized by the CIA, and was then entrenched by widespread revulsion at the apparent reintroduction of the despised "capitulations" by Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1964. In exchange for a \$200 million loan, the shah granted a U.S. request for extraterritorial rights for all U.S. government personnel (broadly defined) working in Iran. By appearing to have sold his country to the United States, the shah provided the ideal opportunity for a hitherto middle-ranking cleric to establish himself as the leading credible opposition.

The Battle for Khomeini's Legacy

Ruhollah Khomeini was an unorthodox ayatollah. Criticized by his fellow clerics for having the temerity to indulge in Sufi poetry and teach philosophy, even on occasion Western philosophy, Khomeini's broad appeal, especially among the young, was rooted in his stubborn determination to resist the system, be it clerical juridical dogma or the Pahlavi state. Believing that the *ulema* had every right to participate in politics in its broadest sense (and indeed he could point to the Constitutional Revolution as an example), Khomeini was one of the few mullahs to possess a progressive opinion on the issue of modernization, promoting science and philosophy and attacking those clerics he viewed as reactionary and backward, a reality apparently acknowledged by the U.S. Department of State at the time. Acutely aware of the growing critical literature on development by Iranian writers, Khomeini berated the shah for working with foreigners rather than his own people. Khomeini was therefore a far more complex and nuanced personality than the fundamentalist caricature his opponents later constructed.

When he rose to the podium to criticize the shah vigorously for selling out to the Americans, Khomeini touched a raw nerve among indignant Iranians of all political hues. He was essentially as much a national leader (with a keen understanding of left-wing thought) as he was a religious leader, and his ability to transcend and combine these major strands of Iranian political thought into a particularly potent form of religious national-

ism allowed him to become the leader of the dramatic expression of collective will that overthrew the shah. Only by going beyond the popular image can one begin to understand the current bitter contest for Khomeini's intellectual and consequently political legacy.

In 1979, Khomeini found himself leading a revolution that was, and remains, plural in construction and united only in its enmity toward its common foe, the shah and his puppet master, the United States. The revolution was as much if not more defined against the U.S. government as it was against the shah. Nationalists, religious zealots, and the Left all had reason to distrust and in many cases dislike the United States, defined for them by Khomeini as the "Great Satan," or the "great tempter," in an allusion to the temptations offered by rampant materialism (as he understood the United States) and the ruin it could bring to societies.

Iran is both antagonistic toward the West and philosophically intimate with it.

Using a discourse familiar to most of his constituents, Khomeini had simply but highly effectively conveyed the standard liberal/Marxist critique of capitalism in religious terms. Khomeini proved a political master at synthesizing diverse ideas and authenticating them in religious language suitable for his audience. The most obvious expression of this was the constitution of the "Islamic Republic" (there is no concept of republicanism within the Islamic tradition), but it was also clear in popular slogans where, for example, Khomeini would call on the "oppressed of the world to unite."² Khomeini's refrain from expelling Americans from Iran on his triumphal return and his express orders to evict radical Iranian students when they first tried to seize the U.S. embassy in February 1979 demonstrate that "Great Satan" was a term of warning rather than an absolute condemnation.

The students' final seizure of the embassy on November 4, 1979—a definitive moment in the history of the Islamic Republic—had more to do with the growing anarchy within Iran and Khomeini's keen sense of opportunism than with any ingrained antipathy he might have had. Indeed, by November 1979, just ten months after coming to power, Khomeini, for all his vaunted charisma, was rapidly discovering the painful difficulties of governing a society so recently released from the grip of an autocrat. Religious and left-wing factions once united against the shah were vying for positions in the new government, and Khomeini found himself reacting to, as much as dictating, events.

Controversy began to brew over the structure of the new Islamic Republic—a term Khomeini had insisted on, even though his writings on Islamic government made no mention of republicanism.³ Khomeini was nothing if

not pragmatic, and he recognized the need to accommodate a wide range of views, although the constitution that was finally adopted arguably proved a compromise too far. Sitting atop what proved to be a relatively liberal republican constitution with a clear separation of powers and a national focus (Khomeini insisted that all candidates for state positions be born in Iran) was the supreme religious authority of the *velayat-e faqih*, the Guardianship of the Jurist.

Reformists believe that political education will in turn change political institutions.

The *velayat-e faqih* was a Khomeini innovation, though not without foundation in Shi'a political writings. Its precise remit remained conveniently vague, however, and thus institutionalized ambiguity within the Iranian political system—an ambiguity that Khomeini's actions would define and sustain. Khomeini had no intention of using his position as Guardianship of the Jurist to interfere in the day-to-day affairs of state

or even, in spite of his extensive constitutional powers, to be designated “head of state,” a position retained by the president. The Supreme Jurist, as has subsequently been confirmed by those who drafted this particular part of the constitution, was meant to guide, not dictate, on broad issues of ethics and Islamic law. Khomeini tended to adopt this style himself, guiding rather than dictating by often establishing committees whenever he faced a problem⁴ and by adding yet another layer to government—the Expediency Council—to mediate disputes between the Majlis and the Guardian Council.

The ambiguity institutionalized in the *velayat-e faqih* and the flexibility it incorporated in many ways enabled the force of Khomeini's personality to salvage a constitutional system which was cumbersome and clumsy almost by design. Yet, even Khomeini needed assistance; his decision to back the students who had occupied the U.S. embassy, made after he was notified of what had happened, was a tactical decision intended to satiate the crowd and divert popular attention away from internal disputes. According to many Iranians, including some of the hostage-takers themselves, the seizure of the U.S. embassy was subsequently seen as worse than a crime; it was a mistake. As with the subsequent Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980, however, it served a purpose: attention was redirected toward an external enemy, and internal disputes were expediently shelved, albeit temporarily. Thus, the Islamic Revolution in Iran headed into its first decade without a satisfactory domestic settlement, driven by a religious nationalism and increasingly defined by its antagonism toward the United States.

Rafsanjani's Blend of Economics and Religion

With Khomeini's death in 1989, no other leader was able to sustain his ambiguous system. The new president, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, was a successful merchant and a cleric who sought to remold the Islamic Republic in his own image through an alliance with the new Supreme Jurist, the distinctly unqualified Ayatollah Ali Hoseini Khamenei. The new Rafsanjani settlement abolished the post of prime minister and arrogated its powers to the presidency. Yet at the same time, Khamenei's position was buttressed by inserting the much-contested term "absolute" into his constitutional title, controversially implying that he enjoyed absolute authority in scriptural interpretation, which some argued extended into the political sphere.

Structurally, the political system was an alliance between the capital-rich mercantile bourgeoisie and the conservative *ulema*, whose espousal of authoritarian, doctrinaire Islamism provided the ideal opium for the masses. The result was a religious veneer under which the new elite could accumulate capital rampantly through traditional, unaccountable, and opaque means without the fear of being criticized for religious and revolutionary hypocrisy. Rafsanjani sought to govern through a personalized and highly centralized bureaucracy, a process of political normalization which sought to present a maturing and more stable environment but which reminded many Iranians of political structures under the shah.

For all the palpable and likely strengths of a political structure founded largely on an expanding network of commercial vested interests, Rafsanjani's mercantile bourgeois republic was unsuccessful in securing firm and durable social foundations. Above all, this failure was based on a profound misreading by Rafsanjani and his allies of social developments since the 1979 revolution. Most obvious was their inability to recognize the changes wrought in Iranian society by the experience of the 1979 revolution and the war fought with Iraq from 1980 to 1988. Put simply, having successfully overthrown a monarchy just a decade earlier, Iranians were not about to bear witness to the establishment of another autocracy in the form of an imperious presidency with accumulated powers and an absolute Supreme Jurist who, his supporters argued, could overturn any legal ruling. Furthermore, the experience of war had made Iranians more cynical of government. In short, in the 10 years after the shah's demise, Iranians were making the transition from subjects to citizens.

In addition, the environment had changed economically. Having encouraged a high birth rate, the government of the Islamic Republic now found itself with a young and ambitious population open to new ideas and eager for jobs. The new mercantile bourgeoisie found it difficult to provide either,

largely because their economic *mentalite* worked against long-term investment. Indeed, when Europe's industrial capitalists met their mercantile counterparts in Iran, they rapidly discovered that they spoke a different language, with the former seeking a transparent environment suitable for long-term investment and the latter talking the language of trade. Moreover, the scourge of wealth disparity, which had significantly helped to bring down the shah, now returned with a vengeance. As the promised economic miracle of the era of reconstruction, as Rafsanjani liked to characterize his administration, failed to materialize, the state increasingly turned to repression administered and justified through a particularly rigorous interpretation of Islamic dogma.

Anxious to deliver on the economic front, Rafsanjani increasingly conceded political ground to his conservative allies at home while reaching out to Western businesses (and by extension their governments) in a bid to secure some form of investment. This strategy failed on both counts, and Rafsanjani the populist discovered that by the mid-1990s his erstwhile allies were promoting an increasingly authoritarian version of Islam, going so far as to debunk the notion of a republic, calling for an Islamic state instead. This increasingly authoritarian trend soon provoked a vigorous intellectual response, which ultimately manifested itself as the Second Khordad Movement, or the Reform Movement.

Khatami and the Second Khordad Movement

The Reform Movement is the ideological successor to the 1906 Constitutional Movement and the National Front of the early 1950s. Growing in strength during the Rafsanjani administration, it came of age with Khatami's election in 1997. Members include students; journalists; lay and religious intellectuals; and, crucially, members of the government. The movement's chief strategist until he was critically injured in an assassination attempt in 2000, Saeed Hajarian was even a former senior official in the Intelligence Ministry, ostensibly an institutional pillar of the revolutionary establishment.

Its avowed remit is to fulfill the political promise of the Islamic Revolution, the product of more than a century of Iranian political agitation. Originating in the Islamic Left, which had been marginalized during Rafsanjani's presidency, the movement sought "Iran for the Iranians" complete with civil rights, the rule of law, and the establishment of an Islamic democracy. The concept of Islamic democracy was an intellectual synthesis between Western democratic norms and a revitalized, redefined (Iranian) Islam drawing on Islam's philosophical rather than juridical roots. Its model for change derived from the reform process that characterized nineteenth-century Brit-

ain, while its model for religious democracy came from the United States as defined by Alexis de Tocqueville, who argued that the secular condition of the American democratic state was held together by the reality of a religious society. “Religious peoples are therefore naturally strong in precisely the spot where democratic peoples are weak: this makes very visible how important it is that men keep their religion when becoming equal.”⁵

The intellectual justification for this debt to Western civilization was argued with some success by the lay religious philosopher Abdol Karim Soroush, who argued that Iran was the heir of three cultures: Iranian, Islamic, and Western. This legitimized the appropriation of Western ideas and prepared them for authentication through traditional Iranian/Islamic discourse.

Herein lies the central paradox of the Islamic Republic of Iran: it is both antagonistic toward the West and philosophically intimate with it. Khatami said as much when, following a digression on the Puritans in the United States, he quoted de Tocqueville in his CNN interview:

In his [de Tocqueville’s] view, the significance of this [American] civilization is in the fact that liberty found religion as a cradle for its growth and religion found the protection of liberty as its divine calling. Therefore in America, liberty and faith never clashed, and as we see, even today most Americans are religious people. Therefore the approach to religion, which is the foundation of Anglo-American civilization, relies on the principle that religion and liberty are consistent and compatible.⁶

Even more intriguing was his decision to pay his respects at the tomb of Rousseau. Two other points emerge from these developments: the reformist affinity for the notion of the Protestant ethic⁷ and their ease with the concept of secularism. Having been a taboo subject for the first decade of the Islamic Republic under Khomeini, the idea of secularism—distinct from laicism, which was taken to mean irreligiosity—began to take hold among the politically aware public. Invoking the logic of the American Founding Fathers, reformist intellectuals argued that the state could not impose religion but rather that belief is a matter for the individual. Indeed, reformists argued that secularism would enhance religion through the liberation of criticism because “a single examined faith is nobler than a thousand imitated, shaky, and weak beliefs.”⁸ A society revitalized by such a reinvigorated faith would inevitably produce a religious government. This in essence is the meaning of Islamic democracy in Iran.

Khatami was a product of the Reform Movement and its chosen leader following his nomination by a number of reformist factions, but he did not define it. Acutely aware of the fate of previous democratic experiments, the new reformist administration moved with caution in all areas but one: institutionalizing political consciousness. The reformists recognized that it was

the failure to properly connect with the people that led to the collapse of the Constitutional Movement and the fall of Mossadegh, and thus they were determined to develop Iranian political consciousness and socialize the idea of democracy.

Reformists believed that they could hasten the transformation of Iranian social and political culture through an intensive diet of political education, which would in turn change political institutions. They anticipated, somewhat naively, that reluctant conservatives would then bow to the inevitable and compromise by relinquishing some of their power to secure their commercial interests, which could only be enhanced by the existence of a more stable, socially founded, and secure republic operating within a legal framework that protected investment benefiting all. It was a powerful argument, and even the authoritarian Khamenei declared that the era of Islamic Democracy had begun. Significant gains were also made in accountability and transparency, most dramatically in the autumn of 1998 when revelations emerged that rogue elements in the Ministry of Intelligence had conducted a private, lethal vendetta against intellectuals over the past decade. As the government conducted a root-and-branch purge of the Intelligence Ministry, preparations were in hand for the most dramatic electoral triumph—that of the Majlis in 2000.

The New Reformers after Khatami

Ironically, at the moment of its greatest triumph, the Reform Movement revealed its fundamental weakness: no detailed ideological blueprint for productive action existed, an ailment that had afflicted its predecessors. In short, the movement seemed to have little idea how to proceed, and no concrete plans to realize the attractive slogans that had mobilized the Iranian public in unprecedented numbers. In control of both the executive and the legislature, the reformists were in a position of remarkable strength, and popular expectation was high. Yet at this crucial point, they proved singularly unable to convert their electoral victory. That the conservative establishment would resist was to be expected, yet leading reformist politicians evidently miscalculated the ferocity of the response, especially when conservative economic vested interests came under threat.

Arguably, the reformers needlessly provoked a harsher than necessary response when, in the euphoria of the 2000 electoral victory, they decided to target Rafsanjani as the linchpin of the mercantile bourgeois state, with the consequence that obstruction to reform was unusually severe. There were other weaknesses too: an overcautious approach to structural reform; inexperience in the drafting of legislation, causing technical delays; and the de-

pressing reality that some reform politicians were just as seduced by the spoils of power as their conservative opponents.

Khatami's main flaw in approach, aside from his unwillingness to plunge the Islamic Republic into crisis, is his legalism. It is difficult to be legalistic against opponents who have contempt for any practical notion of law, and it is supremely ironic that the citadel of conservative resistance is currently the Judiciary, headed by Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahrudi, whose draconian judgments and Iraqi origins have combined to make him the most detested man in Iran today.

Shahrudi has systematically abused the powers of the Judiciary to serve his own interests along with conservative interests in general, amassing his own secret police and a budget larger than that of the presidency. Supporting extremist judges who recklessly dispensed disproportionate judgments on reformist politicians and activists, the Judiciary rapidly has become an embarrassment to Iranians of all hues. On one occasion, the head of the Tehran district announced that all discussion about negotiations with the United States would henceforth be treated as a criminal offense. This proclamation was received with such derision among the Iranian public at large that it was soon rescinded. Indeed, while a succession of long prison sentences combined with political obstructionism succeeded in weakening the credibility of the Reform Movement and its hapless politicians, the continuing judicial repression was judged by some, including some conservatives, to be counterproductive.

As reformists regrouped and reflected on their failures following the harsh repression which succeeded their Majlis victory, clear signs emerged of renewed agitation among key social groups, including the press and crucially the students, with the primary catalyst being the Judiciary's conviction for blasphemy and quick condemnation to death of the war hero and former history professor Hashem Aghajari, following his reported assertion that Muslims did not need to follow their clerics like "monkeys." This single act of grotesque stupidity and injustice succeeded in catalyzing a new, more radicalized Reform Movement among the young, occasionally labeled the "Third Force," with an agenda for political change far in excess of the traditional reformists, who were regarded by the new reformists with hardly disguised disdain. Driven by an intensely nationalist rage, now stripped of religious pretensions, these new reformists are in no mood for compromise.

Many Iranians want dialogue, but a similar number continue to be suspicious of the U.S.

Regime Change from Within?

Change in
Iran will be
indigenous.

Donald Rumsfeld is a popular man among ordinary people in contemporary Iran. He represents the sort of moral clarity and certainty of purpose that is missing from the seemingly ambiguous morass that is Iranian politics today. In a recent poll conducted in the summer of 2002 by Iranian government agencies, an overwhelming majority of Iranians (approximately 70 percent) were sympathetic to the United States and wanted their government to initiate dialogue with Washington. Moreover, according to the results of one poll reportedly conducted by the Ministry of Intelligence, general public dissatisfaction was so great that some members of the hard-line establishment concluded they could not depend on popular support if the United States attacked.

The Khatami-led Reform Movement seized on this shocking revelation as a warning that a failure to implement a democratic settlement was weakening Iran against external enemies. Conservatives, outraged by these revelations, characteristically lambasted the results as forgeries designed to weaken national morale; the pollsters were accused of being fifth columnists who had sold the country to foreigners and whom, some zealots argued, should therefore be tried for treason.⁹ Yet, all sides missed one aspect of the poll: although many Iranians wanted dialogue, a similar number continued to be suspicious of the United States. The results, as one pollster commented, should not be condemned as an act of treason but as a reflection of the real political sophistication of the Iranian public.

The Iranian public is acutely aware of the deficiencies of its political system, of its continuing failures to establish a comprehensive democratic settlement. As even moderate conservatives object to the blatant transgression of revolutionary principles by hard-line members of the elite, the Iranian public is increasingly antagonistic to the state apparatus. The public remains keenly politically aware and can no longer be taken for granted by the revolutionary establishment. Most importantly, it is an intensely nationalistic public with an acute interest in their specifically Iranian identity, which is increasingly defined against the Arabs and Islam.¹⁰ It remains proud of the fundamental principles of freedom and independence that the revolution seemed to herald while condemning and lamenting its excesses and the corruption of those values by an increasingly isolated hard-line conservative elite. It looks forward to the fulfillment of its promise, begun in the Constitutional Movement, whose centenary will encourage reflection on how far the Iranians have come and how much still remains to be done, even if few reformists doubt the end result.

As the United States considers what to do next in Iran, it ought to weigh judiciously the merits and demerits of aggressive intervention in a revolution that has yet to run its course. It should make clear its purpose and communicate that purpose to the Iranian public, making a plain distinction between the Iranian nation and the unelected minority, avoiding any tendency to condescend, and making its criticism specific and its policies surgical. Above all, the United States should align itself with the aspirations of the Iranian people and recognize the reality of the revolution, which has yet to reach fruition and fulfill its promise. The Bush administration should continue with its measured response of support for the democratic aspirations of the Iranian people, coordinating as much as possible with its allies, especially the European Union, so as to internationalize its policy, using language calculated to convey the sincerity of the U.S. government in this respect. Most importantly, the United States should recognize that change will be indigenous and thus not align itself with overseas opposition groups whose understanding of politics on the ground in Iran is limited.

Washington should resist the temptation to indulge in direct intervention.

Nobody wants to turn back the clock, and although there is general sympathy for the United States (Iran is one of the few countries that did not have antiwar demonstrations prior to the invasion of Iraq), there remains widespread suspicion of U.S. motives, the U.S. tendency toward short-term-ism, the alleged support for separatist movements, and the belief that the United States will compromise with the conservative authoritarians if U.S. security concerns (and those of her regional allies) are met. The United States must tackle this suspicion head on by developing a coherent and consistent policy which reiterates moral support for human rights and democratization in Iran and by assuring the Iranian people that the United States does not want to see a perpetually weakened and territorially threatened Iran.

Most fundamentally and crucially, the United States must recognize and publicly state that Iran should continue to change from within as it has in the past. At the same time, Washington should resist the temptation to indulge in direct intervention—military, economic, or political—which will only encourage doubt and prevarication by a nationalistic society acutely aware of its historical relationship with the United States and unwilling to be characterized as foreign stooges. In August 1953, the CIA and Great Britain's MI6, driven by Cold War imperatives and encouraged by favorable poll ratings in Iran, orchestrated a coup that overthrew the elected Mossadegh

government, restored royal autocracy, and effectively suffocated the fledgling Iranian democratic experiment at birth. Few could have anticipated the enormity of the long-term cost to U.S.-Iranian relations. Upon the coup's fiftieth anniversary this summer, U.S. policymakers need to reflect carefully on the consequences of their actions.

The reform movement has discovered new vigor.

Understanding the consequence of external interference is even more pertinent now, as recent agitation on student campuses and in cities around the country reveals that, far from having been systematically crushed, the reform movement has discovered new vigor. Driven by young, uncompromising idealists and supported by an overwhelmingly young population frustrated by the religious dogma which constrains them daily, there is little indication that the democratic tendency introduced during the Constitutional Revolution in 1906 and methodically nurtured over a century has lost its way. If anything, it is more determined and, unlike its predecessor movements, is sustained and supported by a broad swathe of a politically aware public. For Iran's hard-line establishment, it may be time to consider "[t]hat an army may be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come."¹¹

Notes

1. See Masoud Behnood, "Etemad," 17 Shahrivar 1381, September 8, 2002, p. 5. In this editorial, the author goes even further back to the period of Amir Kabir, who was prime minister from 1848 to 1851.
2. For further details, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993).
3. "Developments in Iran," Tehran Home Service, BBC SWB ME/6043/A/14, February 14, 1979; "Developments in Iran," Tehran Home Service, BBC SWB ME/6044/A/4, February 14, 1979.
4. See Hasan Yusefi Eshkevari, "Law & the Women's Movement" (speech delivered at the Berlin Conference, April 2000), reprinted in *Conference-e Berlin: Khedmat ya Khiyanat?* (The Berlin conference: Service or treason?), ed. M. A. Zakrayi, Tar-e no. 1379, 2000, p. 229.
5. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 419.
6. BBC SWB ME/3210 MED/2, January 9, 1998.
7. See "John Locke and the Idea of Tolerance," *Tous*, 21 Shahrivar 1377, September 12, 1998, p. 6. This reflected a growing trend among reformist commentators to identify themselves with Protestants (and as pluralist) while the conservatives were characterized as Catholic (and absolute). See *Jame'eh*, 27 Tir 1377, July 18, 1998, p. 6; *Jame'eh*, 29 Tir 1377, July 20, 1998, p. 6 (discussions of the life of Martin Luther).

8. Abdolkarim Soroush, "Tolerance & Governance," in *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, trans. and eds. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 155.
9. See Ayatollah Jannati, "Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran," BBC Mon ME1 MEPol, December 20, 2002 (speech).
10. See Tale H, *Tarikhche-ye maktab-e pan-Iranism* (The history of the ideology of Pan-Iranism), Sarmarqand, 1381, 2002.
11. Victor Hugo, *Histoire d'un crime* (1852).

