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Is the Iranian Regime Collapsing?

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- To grasp Iran's ambitions and foreign policy it is necessary to understand the Islamic Republic's religious ideology which aspires to establish global Islamic rule – under Shi'ite leadership. This belief lies at the heart of Iran's foreign policy, including its ambition to acquire nuclear weapons.
- Ayatollah Khomeini ruled that a Muslim mustn't touch infidels, deal with them, or come into contact with them. Jews, in particular, are considered unclean. Iranian leaders call for the annihilation of Israel because these "unclean Jews" occupy the Muslim land of Palestine and hold the keys to the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque.
- When Ahmadinejad declared that Israel ought to be wiped off the map, he added that this was merely the first stage of the confrontation with the West, which means Christianity. Indeed, part of the animosity that Iranians express toward Judaism and Israel stems from the fact that they consider Judaism to be a pillar of the Christian faith.
- The Revolutionary Guards have taken over most of the economy, most of the political positions, and have infiltrated the judiciary system, though they continue to let Khamenei act as the face of their regime. Unlike the religious leaders of Iran, the Revolutionary Guards lack moral and religious values, with the exception of one very deep religious belief: that they are the messengers of the Mahdi, the vanguard of the messiah.
- In one possible scenario, the regime will collapse from the inside. Changes to the system of subsidies can only add to Ahmadinejad's unpopularity. In this context, international pressure and sanctions on Iran will very much influence the continuation of the struggle against the regime.

Iran's Ideology

To grasp Iran's ambitions and foreign policy, one must first understand the Islamic Republic's religious ideology. The Iranian regime believes that the right religion for humanity is Islam, and the right sect of Islam is Shi'ism. An Iranian's religious and national duty is to restore Shi'ism to its rightful position of leadership.

To express his enduring respect for Judaism and Christianity, Ayatollah Khomeini used to say, "Moses is my right eye and Jesus is my left." But in a meeting with Islamic ambassadors in Tehran, he also aired the view that today, given how diluted those faiths have become, there are no authentic Jews or Christians left.

Iran's ultimate aim is to establish global Islamic rule, a new Islamic empire, but this time under Shi'ite leadership. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad himself endorses the Shi'ite belief that once the Mahdi ("the Guided One") makes his prophesied return, the whole world will convert to Shi'ism. This belief, strange as it may sound to Western ears, lies at the heart of Iran's foreign policy, including its ambition to acquire nuclear weapons. It is for this reason that this ambition presents a grave problem not merely for Israel, but for Arab countries, Europe, and the whole world.

Ahmadinejad once visited a painting exhibition in Tehran and remarked that there are two main arts in life: *jihad* and *shahadah* ("religious war" and "martyrdom"). That's the essence of his ideology. During the Iran-Iraq war, the regime was criticized for engaging in a futile conflict that took the lives of half a million Iranians. The reply was that during the eight years of war, some seven million Iranians were born, so why cry over half a million killed "for the sake of Islam"?

In his book *Towzihol-Masael* (The Explanation of Problems), Khomeini contended that Jews, Christians, Bahais, and Zoroastrians are considered infidels insofar as they refuse to accept Mohammad as a prophet, as are Sunnis, insofar as they don't accept the twelve Imams of the Shi'ites. Khomeini then ruled that a Muslim mustn't touch infidels, deal with them, or come into contact with them. Jews, in particular, are considered unclean. In his 1970 book *Velayat-e faqih* (Islamic Government), he portrayed the Jews as crooks, liars, and enemies of Islam.

Iranian leaders call for the annihilation of Israel because these "unclean Jews" occupy the Muslim land of Palestine and hold the keys to the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and other Islamic holy places. For tactical reasons, the Iranians take up the banner of the Palestinian cause in order to show the Arab countries that while they are making peace with the Jewish enemy, the Iranians are the only Muslims who uncompromisingly fight on behalf of the Palestinians.

Ahmadinejad denies the Holocaust for tactical considerations, too. By denying the Holocaust, the Iranians deny the legitimacy of the State of Israel and thereby gain respect in the Islamic world.

When Ahmadinejad declared that Israel ought to be wiped off the map, he added that this was merely the first stage of the confrontation with the West, which, for all intents and purposes, means Christianity. Indeed, part of the animosity that Iranians express toward Judaism and Israel stems from the fact that they consider Judaism to be a pillar of the Christian faith.

A Five-Point Plan to Foster Regime Change

Ahmadinejad contends repeatedly that: “Nuclear development is the inalienable right of the Iranian people.” He has attempted to make Iran’s nuclear policy into a matter of national pride. So is the prevention of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons a lost cause?

At a meeting with the heads of the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I presented a five-point plan for eliminating the Iranian nuclear threat which, despite all the risks in its implementation, appears to me to be the sole way to eliminate the danger.

- 1) Create a very real military threat by concentrating naval forces in the Persian Gulf and voicing threats of war at the Iranian regime.
- 2) Widen international sanctions that will paralyze the Iranian economy in the same manner as Gaddafi’s Libya.
- 3) Encourage ethnic minorities in Iran to launch guerrilla warfare against the regime. The Baluchis in the southeast, Turkmen in the northeast, Azaris in the northwest, Kurds in the west, and Arabic-speaking tribes in the southwest are each discriminated against and each has a history of guerrilla actions.
- 4) Transfer funds to opposition bodies inside Iran to finance strikes, demonstrations, and other resistance activities.
- 5) Rally three million Iranian exiles to lobby leaders in the countries where they now reside to join the international effort to effect regime change in Iran.

In the Wake of the June 2009 Elections

Since the elections, some figures from inside the regime, such as Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mahdi Karroubi, have turned against the regime's leaders, with the result that the leadership is divided. Mousavi and Karroubi did not want to overthrow the regime, they just want to make some reforms. But the Green movement, which began as a protest against the fraudulent election results, today chants "death to the dictator," which amounts to a call for regime change and not merely the cancellation of the elections. Whereas Khomeini had always tried to balance the radicals and the so-called reformists, Khamenei today has put all his eggs in the basket of Ahmadinejad and the Revolutionary Guards.

At the same time, the fear of voicing opposition to the regime has evaporated. Seven months after the elections, we still see widespread demonstrations. As someone who closely follows Iranian political affairs, I would say that at least 60 percent of Iranians are very much against the regime. (Others say the figure is 70-80 percent.) Two groups still support the regime: deeply religious people in poor, rural areas, and those who depend on the salary, pension, and other economic advantages the regime affords them. The big question is whether the regime will succeed in stifling the protest movement through suppression and arrests.

Possible Future Scenarios

In effect, two possibilities now confront Iran. In the first scenario, the regime will collapse from the inside, buckling under the pressure of the protest movement, much as the Shah's regime collapsed 31 years ago. Changes to the system of subsidies will yield much higher prices for consumer goods such as fuel, rice, and bread, which can only add to Ahmadinejad's unpopularity. In this context, international pressure and sanctions on Iran will very much influence the continuation of the struggle against the regime.

The second possible scenario would see the Revolutionary Guards take over the leadership of Iran more and more. In fact, they have already begun to do so by shunting aside most of the prominent ayatollahs. The Revolutionary Guards have taken over most of the economy, most of the political positions, and have infiltrated the judiciary system, though they continue to let Khamenei act as the face of their regime. Unlike the religious leaders of Iran, the Revolutionary Guards lack moral and religious values, with the exception of one very deep religious belief: that they are the messengers of the Mahdi, the vanguard of the messiah. Indeed, most of the commanders of the Revolutionary Guards are uneducated. Most have never visited a Western country.

Either way, in the end this regime will collapse. Whether it will happen next year or in two years or five years or even ten years, nobody can know. But I believe that the Iranians will eventually achieve a kind of democratic regime which will be more friendly

toward its neighbors. I come from Iran, I am an Iranian, and I believe that the Iranians are like most other people. They seek the good life and they want democracy. That's what gives me hope that they will manage to create a free society.

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