



# Much Traction from Measured Steps

The Iranian Opposition, the  
Nuclear Issue, and the West

Patrick Clawson

Policy Focus #100 | January 2010



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Front cover: Graffiti reads "Death to Khamenei" on a Tehran bus, July 2009. (Photo courtesy Iran News Now)

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# About the Author

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# Executive Summary

IN ASSESSING THE nuclear impasse in Iran, foreign policy analysts could well ask themselves two questions: What impact will international diplomacy on the nuclear program have on Iran's domestic politics? And, in turn, what impact will Iran's domestic politics have on the issues of most concern to the international community? When these questions were posed in internal deliberations at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in the summer of 2009, even those well versed in Iran and the nuclear issue did not know the answers. The Institute then convened several off-the-record sessions with Iranians, as well as Americans and Europeans who know Iran well, including some in government service, and also hosted several Iranian speakers at its annual conference. Among the Iranians were several recent arrivals from the Islamic Republic, former officials, and individuals close to the leadership of the Green Movement. What follows are the insights this author gained from those discussions.

This report is organized around two themes: first, that domestic politics matter and have changed much since June 12, and, second, that although the interests of the West and the Iranian opposition are not identical, much progress could be made toward making their objectives compatible if each side took a few modest steps regarding issues that are secondary to its own concerns but central to those of the other.

## 'All Politics Is Local'

In Iran, as in most countries, domestic issues trump foreign policy, whether one is a government official or an ordinary citizen.

For its part, the Iranian government continues to be preoccupied with the opposition. The government has not been able to stop the protests sparked by the country's controversial June 12, 2009, presidential election, and since then, twin developments have complicated prospects for compromise within the Iranian political system. First, positions have become more extreme on both the government and the opposition sides. The protestors are now challenging the fundamental

structure of the Islamic Republic, not simply a contested election. Second, within the government, decisionmaking has become more problematic as infighting has grown more intense and more complex. Other than the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, all the major players have been weakened. The atmosphere of intense factional maneuvering impedes consensus and slows decisionmaking. The Iranian government is more likely to be frozen in stalemate than to take a bold decision of any kind.

International negotiators should understand that progress on the nuclear issue, if it comes, would in large part stem from calculations about how that progress will help advance the domestic agenda of their Iranian counterparts. An analogy can be made to a lever and a fulcrum. If the fulcrum is in the correct place, a lever can move much; if the fulcrum is at a different place, the same lever can move little. The lever in this case is action that the international community can bring to bear; the fulcrum is the hardliners' fear of losing power. Where that fulcrum lies depends on domestic Iranian politics, which the international community can do little to influence. If the hardliners' fear is great, the fulcrum will be in a position where the international leverage will have much effect; if the fear is small, the same international leverage will have little impact.

The fulcrum-leverage theory provides the best explanation for Iran's nuclear stance in the second half of 2009. For several months after the June 12 election, when Iran's leaders were worried about the strength of the opposition, Iran softened its nuclear position on several fronts, including the October agreement in principle on the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) deal. When by November the hardliners were also less concerned about the domestic opposition, however, they were less willing to compromise.

Neither the opposition's public figures nor the grassroots organizers seem to care very much about foreign policy issues, including the nuclear impasse. However, a disturbing prospect is that the opposition's public

figures might use any concessions on the nuclear front as yet another weapon in its struggle against the hardliners. Even though the U.S. government should not expect opposition leaders to speak out in favor of compromising with the international community to resolve the nuclear impasse, it is quite conceivable that those leaders would take the more modest step of remaining silent on the issue.

### **A Nuclear Deal at What Expense?**

The cause of reform in the Middle East would suffer a grave setback if the West appears to abandon Iran's beleaguered pro-democratic forces by making a deal with hardline autocrats to satisfy its own geostrategic interests. Indeed, Iranian reformers have long feared just that. They believe the West, including the United States, would negotiate such a deal, even at the expense of Iranian human rights and democracy, if it were convinced that the Islamic Republic would live up to its commitment.

Although President Barack Obama's team has not placed human rights at the top of its agenda with Iran, it has raised human rights issues with Iranian representatives and will continue to do so. Some observers are optimistic that engagement with a hardliner-run regime will deflate the hardliners' "enemy narrative." Others worry that engagement will convey the message that defiant policies reap benefits not produced by accommodating policies. Still others fear that when the United States and its international partners sit down with an Iranian dictatorship whose hands are freshly stained with the blood of peaceful demonstrators, the hardliners will portray such talks as a major triumph.

A powerful ethical argument could be made for why the West should support human rights in Iran. But that is not the only reason for such a policy. During the Cold War, the United States supported Soviet and East European dissidents because it was the right thing to do. Later that support brought incalculable strategic gains. On the other hand, a strong case could be made that U.S. support for Iranian human rights will likely not help that cause and could well hurt it. The problem with that argument is that Iranian

leaders do not agree. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has spent twenty years warning about a "velvet revolution" provoked by foreign support for domestic dissenters.

Iranian hardliners' suspicions about U.S. intentions and actions are obvious. More worrisome are the suspicions of ordinary Iranians, captured in the protestors' slogan "Obama, Obama, either you are with them or with us." The degree of concern generated by the TRR deal is an indication that the international community, and especially the United States, is not effectively explaining to the Iranian people its goals in Iran and its strategy for achieving those goals.

### **Modest Policy Steps**

What are the goals and interests of the international community and the Iranian opposition? The international community wants to resolve the nuclear stand-off with Iran, but it also has an interest in promoting human rights and democracy in that country. The Iranian opposition is promoting human rights and democracy, but it also wants to improve Iran's relations with the rest of the world.

Much progress could be made toward better understanding between the two groups if each side took some modest steps. The West should take steps to uphold the principles of human rights and democracy in Iran while pursuing its nuclear negotiations with the Iranian government. For example, Western leaders could vigorously point out to the Iranian opposition that its best interests are served by not objecting to Iran's efforts to resolve the nuclear dispute, even if that resolution comes under the current government in Tehran.

Such modest steps may have an even greater payoff. The Iranian opposition may take encouragement from the international support. Meanwhile, if the opposition succeeds in making the regime's nuclear stance a matter of controversy inside Iran, the hardliners may be more willing to compromise with international negotiators.

The overriding message of this report is that each side should take those modest steps, but neither should expect more than a modest response.

# 1 | Iranian Hardliners and the Opposition

THE OPPOSITION PROTESTS continue to pre-occupy Iran's government. This movement is much broader than the reform movement of the 1990s, when Muhammad Khatami was president. During that reform movement, protestors never exceeded 100,000. By contrast, according to Tehran's conservative mayor Muhammad Baqer Qalibaf, more than 3 million people protested in the wake of the June 12, 2009, election. Demonstrations are an ongoing threat—at religious gatherings such as the December 27 Shiite holy day of Ashura, at national events such as the December 7 Student Day, at public appearances of government officials, and even at sporting events such as soccer matches. (So many soccer fans have begun to show up wearing green that state television began to broadcast games in black and white).

The government has not been able to stop the protests. It took unprecedented actions to prevent foreign reporting, but to little effect. Its reluctance to kill protestors only emboldened more people to come into the streets, as they did in the tens of thousands on Jerusalem Day and on the November 3 anniversary of the U.S. embassy takeover. Those occasions when protestors were killed—especially the death of the young woman named Neda in June and the protestors shot during the Ashura demonstrations—generated much anger, which strengthened the opposition. The show trials of reformist figures, many of them former officials, have not intimidated the activists who are leading the protests. Nor have the trials convinced the uncommitted that the reformers are engaged in a sinister plot, as alleged by the government. Mass arrests and mistreatment in jail have only led to outrage over alleged rape and torture, disgusting many previously apolitical Iranians.

In short, no matter what the regime has done, it has failed to end the protests in the streets. Indeed, since the December 27 Ashura demonstrations, the momentum appears to be on the side of the protestors. That is, the demonstrations are not getting smaller in size; if anything, each demonstration appears larger than the

last. The demonstrations are spreading across the country. Whereas the June postelection demonstrations were almost entirely confined to Tehran, November 3 saw demonstrations in several other major cities, and December 27 witnessed protests in many smaller towns as well as the main cities. The demonstrations seem to be drawing in a broader range of society. Many of those in the Ashura protests appeared to be of traditional orientation and modest means, not Western-oriented students or the well-to-do.

Nor has the government found a way to stop the protests off the streets. Intellectuals and technocrats are openly turning their backs on the government. The organized boycott of state film festivals, poetry festivals, and book festivals resonates widely in a society that respects cultural figures. Some forms of protest have been remarkably creative, such as disfiguring currency notes with pro-opposition slogans.

Beyond the popular protests, the hardliners are concerned about the divisions within the elite. These divisions are obvious in what some leaders say and in what other leaders are not allowed to say. The myth of revolutionary unity, so important to hardliners, is difficult to sustain in the face of such obviously profound differences. In a November 4 speech, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, claimed that Westerners were provoking political conflict among Iranians in order to pressure the Islamic Republic over the nuclear issue.

Perhaps the authorities' worries are exaggerated. Consider how Tehran still complains about the long-discredited Mujahedin-e Khalq, or People's Mujahedin. But for those concerned with the nuclear issue, the key question does not involve the likelihood that protests or internal divisions will displace the current government but rather how afraid and preoccupied that government is with the protests. In this game, the other side's perceptions are more important than the reality it actually faces.

Whatever the truth, the hardliners' fear about preserving their power provides the international

community with leverage to use against them. As noted in the executive summary, an analogy can be made to a lever and a fulcrum.<sup>1</sup> If the fulcrum is in the correct place, a lever can move much; if the fulcrum is at a different place, the same lever can move little. The lever in this case represents the efforts that the international community can bring to bear; the fulcrum is the government hardliners' fears of losing their power. Where that fulcrum rests depends on domestic Iranian politics that the international community can do little to influence. If the hardliners' fears are great, the fulcrum will be in a position where the international leverage

will have much effect; if their fears are small, the same international leverage will have little impact.

The fulcrum-leverage theory provides the best explanation for Iran's nuclear stance in the second half of 2009. For several months after the June 12 election, when Iran's leaders were worried about the strength of the opposition, Iran softened its nuclear position on several fronts, including the October agreement in principle on the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) deal. But when, by November, the hardliners were less concerned about the domestic opposition, they were also less willing to compromise.

1. "The Law of the Lever [states that] if, for example, a 1-g feather were balanced by a 1-kg rock, the feather would be 1,000 times farther from the fulcrum than the rock; if a 1-kg rock were balanced by another 1-kg rock, the fulcrum would be in the middle." (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lever>).

## 2 | Things Have Changed Since June 12

SINCE JUNE 12, 2009, twin developments have complicated prospects for compromise within the Iranian political system. First, the government and the opposition have adopted more extreme positions. Second, infighting has become more intense and more complex, thereby creating obstacles to decisionmaking.

### **Movement toward More Extreme Positions**

Within the government, the voices of reformers and dealmakers such as former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Majlis speaker Ali Larijani are heard less and less. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, relinquishing his position as arbiter, has joined the most extreme elements. Meanwhile, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is assuming an increasingly visible role in politics and the economy. It has taken over the telecommunications companies, usurped much of the Intelligence Ministry's role, and announced plans to be an active presence in educational institutions at all levels. Within the IRGC itself, the more extreme elements seem to be prevailing, although it is hard to determine who has power; authority depends more on personal relations than on formal position.

On the opposition side, the presidential election campaign highlighted the roles of candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karrubi, as well as former presidents Muhammad Khatami and Hashemi Rafsanjani, all of whom are former high-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic who likely favor keeping much of the Islamic Revolution in place. None of them was heavily involved in creating or organizing the opposition movement; they were thrust forward by a spontaneous and improvised groundswell. Each of them conceded that foreign policy decisions should fall to Khamenei. Had Mousavi, the leading candidate, entered office after the June 12 presidential election, he probably would not have challenged the political order. Instead, he might have tried to remedy the Islamic Republic's internal and external crises by means of slight policy tweaks.

The popular movement was at first prepared to remain within the narrow confines dictated by the Supreme Leader; that is, to be only an election campaign by candidates who differed little on policy issues. But during the last weeks of the campaign, the opposition gained momentum, symbolized by its adoption of the color green and its use of the name "Green Movement," reminiscent of the 1989 Czechoslovak "velvet revolution" or the "color revolutions" in post-Soviet countries such as the 2004–2005 Ukrainian "orange revolution," which Khamenei often decries as Western plots and about which he often warns. The change was consolidated after the election. Today, the gap between the Green Movement's most well-known figures and the people in the streets is widening. The Jerusalem Day and embassy takeover commemoration demonstrations, for example, were organized and promoted by bloggers and leaders of human rights and women's movements. Only after the plans were circulated did Mousavi issue statements calling for demonstrations, but he warned against use of any slogans challenging the Supreme Leader and Iran's foreign policy orientation.

Those oppositionists on the street are now sharpening their positions. Conscious of the failure of past reforms, they have little hope that the Islamic Republic can be saved. The true leaders of the opposition—students, women, human rights activists, and political activists—have little desire to work in a theocratic regime or in a government within the framework of the existing constitution. Noticeable at the December 7 Student Day demonstration was the greater emphasis on rejecting the Islamic Republic as such, including its foreign policy, than on overturning the presidential election results. The protestors also appear to be rejecting the anti-Americanism that has been a hallmark of the Islamic Republic. Symbolically, protestors at the U.S. embassy takeover commemoration walked over a portrait of Khamenei instead of a U.S. flag (an act of disrespect). The chants of "Death to Russia" were heard at both the U.S. embassy takeover commemoration

and especially on Student Day, in part out of hostility to Russia for its support of the hardliners and in part to defy the regime's anti-Americanism.

The popular opposition showed an ever more radical front during the December 27 Ashura demonstrations. Protestors were often prepared to attack the authorities, in one case, overrunning a police station and disarming and beating the officers before setting the station on fire. Instead of being afraid of the *basij* (paramilitary) thugs, demonstrators chanted, "*Tup, tank, basiji; asari nadari*" (cannons, tanks, and *basiji* are no longer effective). The slogan "Death to Khamenei" was widely heard, as was "This is the month of blood; *basijis* will die."

In short, the opposition is becoming increasingly radical. What was a loyal opposition before June 12 is now a disloyal element that rejects the foundations of the Islamic Republic. That disloyalty incurred the harsh rebuke of the regime by Ayatollah Ali Montazeri, who died in December at eighty-seven and was once Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's designated successor, when he said that any "political system based on force, oppression, changing people's votes, killing, closure, arresting and using Stalinist and medieval torture, creating repression, censorship of newspapers, interruption of the means of mass communication, jailing the enlightened and the elite of society for false reasons, and forcing them to make false confessions in jail, is condemned and illegitimate." He also described the *basijis* as forsaking the path of God for the path of Satan.

### Government Infighting

Within the Iranian government, decisionmaking has become more difficult, largely as a result of more intense and more complex infighting. Other than the IRGC, all the major players have been weakened, and even the IRGC has seen its legitimacy corroded. Four actors are especially affected.

The first is Khamenei, whose ability to intimidate others is diminished and whose word is no longer accepted as final. The taboo on open criticism of the leader has been broken repeatedly. The chants grow more extreme at each demonstration, from June's

"Where is my vote?" to late summer's "Death to the dictator" to the November 3 chant "Khamenei is an assassin, his rulership is canceled." Within the ruling circles, President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad ignored Khamenei's blunt order to abandon his vice-presidential pick.

The second actor is Ahmadinezhad, whose legitimacy as president is bitterly resisted by protestors. He is no longer able to present himself as the hero of the ordinary Iranian; indeed, he has had to curtail his public appearances because they give the opposition an opportunity to mobilize. When he marched in the November 3 commemoration of the U.S. embassy takeover, state television approached him for some words but had to cut away when the chants of "Resign, Ahmadi" could be heard in the background. The confrontational style that once seemed his strongest advantage has now turned into a serious problem for hardliners, as illustrated the leader's June dismissal of protestors as "dust" contributed much to the three-million-person turnout at the protests two days later. All his actions generate controversy; many object to his every proposal just because he is the source.

Third are the clergy, who have played little role in political decisions since June 12. The Iranian government has for some time been as much a military dictatorship as a theocracy, and the shift toward the military has been on full display since the presidential election. The only bold criticisms of the hardliners came from Montazeri, while much of the clergy remained silent on the sidelines. Montazeri had been largely out of the public limelight for years following his 1988 dismissal by Khomeini from the role of designated successor as Supreme Leader. Montazeri's newfound popularity was evident in the emotion at his December 21 funeral and during the Ashura protests that coincided with the seven-day mourning commemoration that is central to Shiite tradition. Few other clerics have played much role in the opposition. The Green Movement is arguably the first popular movement in Iran since 1870 in which the clergy are not the central actor.

Fourth are the technocrats and reformers, whose weak voices have been almost completely silenced, at least in the political sphere. However, they continue

to play a role in economic decisionmaking, such as the fall 2009 debate on reforming the subsidy system. And they make much of the government function on a day-to-day basis. To the extent that they sit on their hands in a quiet strike, little will happen: decisions may be made, but they will not be implemented, at least not in a timely and full fashion.

Now weakened, all these actors cannot be mobilized to forge a broad elite consensus on difficult issues. Instead, many of them are resorting to partisan infighting. The constant infighting is leading, in turn, to paralysis: no one actor wants to make a decision, because any decision will subject him to criticism from all the other actors, even those who before might have supported the decision. Thus, decisions are not made and past initiatives remain in effect. On the nuclear issue, the policy paralysis implies that the nuclear program will proceed unhindered by concerns about the reactions of the international community. That course of action suits those in Iran who may have long had the intention of developing nuclear weapons.

What role does the IRGC, the only remaining strong actor, play in this decisionmaking vacuum? Khamenei derives his authority primarily from his control over the IRGC, which has insisted that he is the ultimate authority in Iran. However, Khamenei's claims to religious authority have never been widely accepted by either the senior clergy or the pious public. To what extent, then, is the IRGC still controlled by Khamenei? Most of the evidence indicates that his control remains firm. Khamenei, who continues to pay close attention to the IRGC, ordered a widespread change in leadership positions after the June election. For its part, the IRGC has a long history of regarding itself as existing under the aegis of the Supreme Leader rather than the civilian government; it asserts that its role as defender of the revolution puts it outside of the government's control. However, apparently the IRGC

stood up to Supreme Leader Khomeini in 1982 by insisting that Iran invade Iraq after Saddam Hussein withdrew all Iraqi forces from Iran.

Because Khamenei has become increasingly dependent on the IRGC to sustain his authority, the military leadership is well positioned to evade orders from him. Even though it has not sought to do so and continues to insist vehemently on Khamenei's primacy, relations could fray in the unlikely event that he decides to compromise with the international community by placing constraints on the nuclear program. The placement of the covert Qom nuclear facility on an IRGC base reinforces the indications that the IRGC is playing an increasingly large role in the nuclear program, significant parts of which seem to depend on the Defense Industries Organization. If the IRGC did disagree with any decision to constrain the nuclear program, it is not clear how it would respond if ordered to change course on a matter it believes to be of vital importance to the revolution.

The combination of extreme positions and policy paralysis augurs poorly for Tehran's ability to shift direction on a fundamental strategic choice. But the regime can still make fundamental changes when needed. Even though the regime is an ideological one, expediency is the central feature of its ideology. Khomeini had authorized suspending every principle of Islamic law if such a move proved expedient for the interests of the regime and the preservation of power, the central tenet of the revolution. And the Islamic Republic has been able in the past to make decisions more wrenching than an abandonment of its nuclear program. Specifically, the revolution was for eight years defined by its insistence on "war, war, war until victory" over Iraq, until the day in 1988 when Khomeini drank the cup of poison, as he put it, and accepted a ceasefire. For that to happen, the circumstances had to be dire and, even then, the IRGC had to be fully on board.

### 3 | The Government and the Nuclear Issue: “All Politics Is Local”

LONGTIME U.S. HOUSE SPEAKER Thomas “Tip” O’Neill once said, “All politics is local.” But that lesson is often overlooked by U.S. foreign policy analysts when assessing the politics of another country. They forget that the politicians and the public in other countries, much like those in the United States, are almost always more concerned about domestic issues than about foreign affairs.

In Iran, discontent over the economic situation, restrictions on social and cultural life, and corruption and favoritism are much more on the minds of ordinary Iranians than the nuclear issue. Indeed, there is little reason to think that ordinary Iranians care very much at all about the nuclear issue. As for Iran’s leaders, they have a long record of caring first and foremost about holding on to power. Faced with an opposition that they perceive—correctly or not—is a mortal threat to their grip on power, they base their decisions on all issues, foreign and domestic, on what they think will best reduce that threat. One analyst even claims that Iran has no foreign policy; instead, its domestic political disputes periodically affect how it acts toward the rest of the world. Perhaps extreme, that view is closer to the truth than the all too typical assumption in some diplomatic circles that Iran’s stances in the nuclear negotiations stem from the actions of the international community.

#### **What Accounts for the Tehran Research Reactor Developments?**

Developments on the nuclear issue from July through November 2009 shed some light on the relationship between Iran’s international actions and its local politics. At first, the Iranian government softened its stance, agreeing to inspection of construction of the Arak reactor, additional cameras at the Natanz nuclear enrichment facility, and, most important, discussions of the nuclear issue with the P5+1 countries.<sup>1</sup> During an October 1 meeting with the P5+1 in Geneva, Iran

also agreed in principle to the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) refueling deal, under which Iran would ship out of the country 1,200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium (LEU) at a concentration of 3.5 percent and later receive fuel rods for the TRR with 19.9 percent enriched uranium.

These changes in Iran’s stance were attributable in part to its perception of international unity on these matters. However, that explanation alone seems inadequate because the international community did not agree to a course of action if Iran refused to cooperate. Iran’s actions, especially those at the October 1 Geneva meeting, are more understandable when one factors in the fear in ruling circles after the June 12 election, and especially after the September 18 Jerusalem Day demonstrations. In that atmosphere, international unity weighed more heavily on Iranian authorities than it would have in May, before the elections.

After negotiating the details of the TRR deal in Vienna in October, the Iranian government then rejected it, insisting on changes that government negotiators knew were utterly unacceptable to its international counterparts. By November, the Iranian government was quite prepared to insult a variety of international actors: Russia, by insisting that Moscow could not be trusted to live up to its side of the TRR deal; Turkey, by turning down the proposal by Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), that Iran’s nuclear fuel be held in Turkey until it was swapped for the TRR fuel rods from Russia via France; and ElBaradei himself, by announcing two days before he left office at the IAEA that Iran would ignore the IAEA Board of Governors by building ten new massive enrichment sites—something Iran lacks the capacity to do in any decade soon.

It is hard to attribute the change in Iran’s stance from October to November to international actions

1. The P5+1 comprises the five members of the UN Security Council—the United States, China, Russia, France, and the United Kingdom—plus Germany.

alone. After all, international support for the TRR deal was stronger in November than in October, and so was the pressure on Iran to compromise. For three years Iran had insisted that the nuclear issue rest with the IAEA Board of Governors rather than the UN Security Council, anticipating a more favorable reception from the IAEA. But on November 27 its board adopted by 27–3 (with five abstentions) a resolution Iran vigorously opposed.

A much more plausible explanation for Iran's change in stance is that by November the regime's self-confidence for dealing with the opposition had grown. The regime had come up with plans for what IRGC commander Yadollah Javani called a "soft war"—that is, a comprehensive campaign to crack down on the new social media practices such as Facebook and blogging, to purge universities and the traditional media of reformers, to arrest activists prior to planned demonstration dates, and to win over young minds, starting in elementary school. Even though the size of the biggest demonstrations continued to grow (the December 7 Student Day demonstrations were larger than the November 3 protests), the hardliners seemed much more certain about their ability to suppress and contain the protestors and much less reticent about using raw force. In other words, the hardliners were becoming more confident.

It will be interesting to see what the December 27 Ashura demonstrations do to the hardliners' earlier confidence. If that self-assurance weakens, then progress on the nuclear front may well be the result. How the hardliners read the domestic political scene will be a much greater influence on Iran's nuclear decisions than any action by the international community to impose additional sanctions.

### Three Views ...

To the extent that the hardliners continue to worry about the domestic threat, their concerns, as they affect their stance on the nuclear issue, seem to be divided. The question is: what stance on the nuclear issue will allow the regime to best deal with the opposition threat? Three main views have emerged—views that are not necessarily mutually inconsistent. Furthermore,

each of the main actors appears to be sympathetic to each of the views, though in varying degrees.

The first and probably most important view is that the West is using the nuclear issue to achieve its true goal of bringing down the Islamic Republic. Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani warned on October 24 that the West would "cheat" in the nuclear negotiations because its real goal is to undermine Iran's rights rather than to resolve the nuclear issue. This warning is consistent with Khamenei's warnings for twenty years that the West's true objective is cultural invasion leading to a "velvet revolution." After June 12 what long appeared to be an exaggerated sense of the revolution's vulnerability may suddenly have looked prescient, although an alternative view is that Khamenei was so afraid of a velvet revolution that he provoked one.

In any case, it is little wonder that in his November 1 address to a student congress, Khamenei returned to the formulation he employed much before the nuclear negotiations began in 2003, saying that "A dialogue [between America and Iran] is like the relation between a sheep and wolf that the late imam [Khomeini] said, we 'do not want.'" He has shown no interest in resolving outstanding differences with the West. He frequently returns to the theme that, as he put it in his September 11 sermon, "The enmity of America, Britain, and the Zionists with Iran is a matter of pride for the nation, and this should not frighten us or force us to give up before the enemy."

A second view on how the nuclear issue bears on crushing the opposition is to use negotiations to demonstrate that the international community accepts Iran's hardline rule no matter what human rights abuses the hardliners may commit. Proof that the international community puts geostrategic interests ahead of human rights could send a message to the opposition that it is alone and forgotten, and so further resistance is futile. President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad, in particular, seems to favor the idea that international negotiations give Iran a platform from which to promote its ideological, apocalyptic, and anti-Western agenda. He also expects such negotiations to raise his profile, much as did his Columbia University speech and his denials of the Holocaust—which he regards as great triumphs.

And he sounds confident that in such negotiations, the West will accede to Iranian demands—that is, it will strike a deal that allows Iran to keep its nuclear program. Such a development would almost certainly dishearten the opposition and enhance the legitimacy of the hardliners.

A third view, which several Iranians suggest may be strongest in some IRGC circles, is that rapid progress on the nuclear program is the best way to demonstrate that the current regime is firmly in control and will remain so. A nuclearized Islamic Republic would be well positioned to fend off foreign threats, including the foreign plots for a soft overthrow, which, in this view, are at the heart of the opposition threat. Moreover, a nuclearized Iran would be so powerful that its domestic opponents could never contemplate dislodging it. They would realize that the West must accept the Islamic Republic, thereby abandoning the opposition. Iran should, then, not only develop but also test a nuclear weapon.

### ... but No Consensus

Apparently, the hardline elite do not agree on how to use the nuclear issue to advance their interests, especially preserving their grip on power. In light of the decisionmaking difficulties since June 12, the most likely scenario is a stalemate—no significant change in direction. The Iranian political scene is well designed to sidetrack policy initiatives; actors are able to raise objections that resonate within elite circles to any proposed change in policy. On the nuclear issue, the inability to take policy initiatives plays into the hands of those, presumably including the IRGC, who wish to see the nuclear program steam ahead.

Or the Islamic Republic could extend to the nuclear issue its track record on agreements. Whether in business deals or its pledges to Europeans about human rights, it has tended to prevaricate, to insist on revisions of compromises laboriously negotiated, and to observe agreements only temporarily. And Tehran has continued this practice in dealings about its nuclear program. Repeatedly, hopes for a breakthrough have been dashed when Iran has failed to live up to its agreements. Examples are Iran's agreement in 2003 to suspend enrichment, its agreement in 2004 to the Paris Accord again suspending enrichment, its consent to the 2007 "work program" with Mohamed ElBaradei to resolve outstanding issues of concern to the IAEA, and in October 2009 its agreement to the details of the TRR deal only to then reject the very principle underlying the deal. Iran's record thus leaves little hope that once an agreement has been reached it will be implemented in a sustained manner. That said, the international community has no choice but to strive for such an agreement, because all the alternatives are so unpalatable.

A final note of caution: Iran's hardliners are unconventional adversaries who may respond to typical negotiating strategies in unusual ways. They may fear the West's "carrots," believing that its offers for closer engagement are in fact a ploy for the soft overthrow of the regime by those groups in Iranian society—intellectuals, businessmen, youth, and women—feared by hardliners. However, the hardliners may welcome the prospects of the West's "sticks," believing that sanctions or a military strike would inflict little damage and may rally nationalist support. In short, the international community's carrots may scare the Islamic Republic more than its sticks.

## 4 | The Opposition and the Nuclear Issue

UNDERSTANDING THE OPPOSITION is like the proverbial effort by blind men to understand an elephant, in which each man felt a different part of the animal (trunk, ear, tail, tusk, etc.) and therefore had a vastly different conception from his fellows of what the beast was. In Iran, the opposition is composed of many different strands that disagree on objectives and approach. It is truly impressive how Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad were able to bring together people who disagree on everything other than how much they oppose the two respective leaders and their associates; this was a degree of political ineptitude not seen before in the Islamic Republic.

The various strands of the opposition seem to agree that raising foreign policy issues, including the nuclear impasse, muddies the waters; the opposition is better served by concentrating on domestic concerns. It would therefore be unrealistic for the United States or the international community to expect much from the opposition on any foreign policy issue.

But in ways the opposition's domestic concerns touch on foreign policy. For example, the opposition's united stance against terrorism at home gives the West an opportunity to link the Islamic Republic's sponsorship of terrorism inside Iran with its state support for terrorism abroad. Although many in the opposition may be sympathetic to the causes of some foreign terrorists (such as Palestinian rights), that support differs from support for the use of terrorism. Furthermore, many in the opposition resent that the Islamic Republic has poured resources into Islamist resistance movements such as Hizballah and Hamas. They want to

redirect those resources to domestic needs. That resentment provides the opposition with an opening to turn Iran's support for foreign terrorism into a controversial issue on the domestic scene.

The Jerusalem Day protestors' chant "Nuclear Ahmadi[nezhad], get some rest"—which in Persian implies "stop what you are doing"—illustrates another opportunity. Ahmadinezhad has wrapped himself in the nuclear flag, claiming personal credit for the program's advances, when in fact the program was well under way long before he became president and even though he seems to hold little authority over the program. In the eyes of many Iranians, anything associated with Ahmadinezhad is now unpopular, and that applies to the nuclear program. It seems some in the opposition fear that the nuclear program is meant to consolidate power at home—to show that the regime has staying power and cannot be dislodged.

Another priority for many Iranians is joining the world and ending the cultural isolation, economic restrictions, and revolutionary political stances in which the hardliners rejoice. Such Iranians are thus reexamining anti-Western policy positions in ways little appreciated in the United States. A figure of great moral weight is the late Ayatollah Ali Montazeri, whose active role in the first decade of the revolution is well known to Iranians. In November 2009, in a response to a question about how Iran should react to the nuclear threat from Israel, he called for Iran to give up its nuclear weapons program regardless of any circumstance.<sup>1</sup> He also called the 1979 takeover of the U.S. embassy a mistake and apologized for supporting it at the time.<sup>2</sup>

1. This was written in response to a September letter from Mohsen Kadivar that asked, among other things, "Could you issue a statement to the world announcing the following propositions:...2. Investment, production, storing, and making operational weapons of mass destruction of a military dimension cannot be accepted under any circumstances; 3. Possession of dangerous weapons of mass destruction (for instance, atomic bombs or missiles with nuclear warheads and similar items) by the warlike Israeli government is a de facto threat that must be taken into consideration, and others should take action to eliminate these deadly weapons." Montazeri's response stated in several phrasings his firm opposition to work on such weapons. His repeated statements that there are no exceptions to such a ruling imply that Israel's actions provide no justification for an Iranian nuclear weapons program. He said that other countries are justified in using military force to stop a nuclear weapons program: "Wisdom and religious law require those in power to abstain from any kind of action in the direction of such weapons, and if they do not do this, the people should tell their rulers to abstain from this, and if they violate this, other countries should stop them by any means possible from doing this." That sentence could be read as applying to Iran's nuclear program as well as Israel's or, for that matter, the program of any other nuclear weapons state. Kadivar's letter and Montazeri's response can be found at [http://amontazeri.com/farsi/pop\\_printer\\_friendly.asp?TOPIC\\_ID=228](http://amontazeri.com/farsi/pop_printer_friendly.asp?TOPIC_ID=228). The translations are by the author.

A disturbing prospect is that the opposition's public figures, including candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, will use any concessions on the nuclear front as yet another stick with which to beat the hardliners; the opposition will suggest that it could have gotten a better deal from the international community. Mousavi's priority seems to be winning over Iranian independents who find much to admire in the Islamic Republic but are uncertain about the current leaders such as Ahmadinezhad. Thus, Mousavi will probably not make statements too critical of present policies, especially those on issues of peripheral concern to him such as the nuclear question. In turn, it would be unrealistic for the U.S. government to expect opposition leaders to speak out in favor of resolving the nuclear impasse by compromising with the international community. It is quite conceivable, however, that opposition leaders would take the more modest step of remaining silent on the issue.

Statements by opposition public figures against the Tehran Research Reactor deal feed a view by some in Western capitals that the best prospect for a nuclear agreement may rest with Ahmadinezhad, because he wants to claim that he has forced the West to accept the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. This scenario is implausible. For one thing, Ahmadinezhad lacks the authority to make a deal. The real decisionmakers are the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Khamenei, and they seem to pay little attention to Ahmadinezhad's views. Another factor is the Islamic Republic's long track record of not following through on deals. International negotiators must receive convincing assurances that any agreement would be implemented on a sustained basis, and nothing indicates that Ahmadinezhad would provide any such assurances. The statements made by opposition leaders today may be a poor predictor of what they would do in power, since the motivation for their criticism may be as much to score points about the government as to state principled objections. Plus, it is by no means clear who

would come out on top were the current government to crack. A renewed broad-based elite coalition leading the Islamic Republic could have a very different nuclear policy from a coalition swept in to power by popular protests that create fissures in the security services. Perhaps the most likely scenario for change would be an historic compromise on the order of post-Franco Spain or post-Pinochet Chile—in which case nuclear policy might evolve slowly rather than change abruptly.

What the opposition might do if it came to power matters little at this point, because that prospect is highly uncertain. (Before the December 27 Ashura demonstrations, the chances the regime would fall any time soon seemed vanishingly low; after those protests, a regime fall looks unlikely but not impossible.) The more relevant issue for the international community is how to use the leadership's concern about the opposition to gain leverage in negotiations with Tehran. Many Iranians worry that the Iranian authorities believe a nuclear deal will give them the freedom to crack down on the Green Movement. Some offer a different view, asserting that the opposition is the only hope for normalizing relations between the United States and Iran. They argue that the Islamic Republic is an ideological regime similar in some ways to the Soviet Union, which proved in the end incapable of surviving as a normal state.

Some Iranians long active in the opposition regard as naive any faith in bargains reached with the Islamic Republic's leaders. They argue that when those leaders are under pressure they falsely claim they will compromise when, in fact, their goal is to convince their opponents to concede. They have no intention of following through on their solemn promises, goes the thinking. And even in the unlikely circumstance that a nuclear agreement is implemented on a sustained basis, the Islamic Republic might find another way—such as increased support for terrorism and insurgents—to challenge regional peace, undermine governments, and counter Western interests.

2. In his November 3, 2009, statement on the anniversary of the embassy takeover, Montazeri wrote, "The occupation of the American embassy... was obviously an incorrect action. The embassy of a country is essentially similar to a part of that country, and occupying the embassy of a country that is not officially at war with us was similar to declaring war on that country, which was not a correct action" (author's translation). See [http://amontazeri.com/farsi/pop\\_printer\\_friendly.asp?TOPIC\\_ID=226](http://amontazeri.com/farsi/pop_printer_friendly.asp?TOPIC_ID=226).

## 5 | A Nuclear Deal and Human Rights

THE CAUSE OF REFORM throughout the Middle East would suffer a grave setback if the West appears to abandon Iran's beleaguered pro-democracy forces by making a deal with hardline autocrats to satisfy its geostrategic interests. Indeed, Iranian reformers have long feared just such a deal. Noted dissident Akbar Ganji warned in his September 2006 "Letter to America," printed in the *Washington Post*, "We believe the government in Tehran is seeking a secret deal with the United States. It is willing to make any concession, provided that the United States promises to remain silent about the regime's repressive measures at home." Anecdotal evidence suggests that the great majority of Iranians think human rights is not the U.S. priority vis-à-vis Iran—a view reinforced by the October 1 Geneva accord. In the aftermath of that deal and the late October negotiations about the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) deal, the November 3 demonstrations on the anniversary of the U.S. embassy takeover saw protestors chanting "*Obama, Obama: ya ba ma ya ba unba*"—a play on the Persian meaning of *u ba ma* (he is with us) by asking is Obama with us (*ba ma*) or with them (*ba unba*).

That fear is justified. The West, including the United States, would negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran's hardliners, even at the expense of Iranian human rights and democracy, as long as it was convinced that the Islamic Republic would live up to its commitment. President Obama's March Nowruz (Iranian new year) message to the Iranian people was crafted to signal that he, unlike his predecessor in office, had priorities. The Obama administration was sensitive to critiques of the George W. Bush administration for setting ambitious goals but achieving little. The problem, said the critics, was that the Bush team gave equal importance to all its goals. Meanwhile, it failed to identify opportunities for tradeoffs that would have allowed the administration to make real accomplishments by abandoning overly ambitious objectives.

By contrast, Obama indicated that he was willing to work with the leaders of the Islamic Republic to

achieve a nuclear deal no matter what they did on other fronts, and he would work with a hardline government rather than distinguishing between the government and the Iranian people. Because the Obama team put the emphasis on a nuclear deal, the protests after the June 12 election were, by credible accounts, viewed by the White House as an unwelcome complication. The difference between the swift, strong statements by European leaders in reaction to the human rights abuses compared with the more nuanced statements by Obama and his administration was striking.

Even though the Obama team has not put human rights at the top of its agenda with Iran, it does raise the issue with Iranian representatives and will continue to do so. That is an inevitable part of the U.S. agenda, and has been for more than thirty years. Idealism, including respect for human rights, is part of how Americans define themselves as a people. Certainly human rights will be a major factor in any bilateral U.S.-Iranian engagement.

Perhaps for that reason, the Islamic Republic has been reticent about meeting with Obama administration officials. Indeed, after years of insisting that the fundamental obstacle to resolving the nuclear issue and other disagreements was U.S. preconditions for bilateral talks, Iran has not responded to repeated Obama administration efforts to launch bilateral talks without preconditions. Not only has President Obama written Iranian leaders at least twice proposing such talks, but many other nations have urged Iran to take up the opportunity to explore better relations with the United States. The only public bilateral contact has been a short informal session on the sidelines of the P5+1 talks in Geneva on October 1, 2009—a session Iran insists was not a meeting.

Some analysts are optimistic that U.S. engagement with a hardliner-run regime removes the hardliners' "enemy narrative." Ayatollah Ali Khamenei frequently refers to the United States, and the entire West, as the enemy. It is hard to keep up that refrain when the Islamic Republic is engaging in negotiations with the

U.S. government. The “enemy narrative” is an important justification for cracking down on any form of dissent or free expression. If that narrative is weakened, the regime’s ideological foundations are weakened as well.

Others worry that U.S. engagement with the hardliner-led government conveys the message that defiant policies bring benefits not available under accommodating policies. In his June 4 televised debate with Mir Hossein Mousavi, President Ahmadinezhad said that former president Muhammad Khatami’s detente policy had led to the shutdown of Iran’s nuclear facilities and the imposition of United Nations sanctions on Iran. He also argued, “In the course of the twenty-seven years during which you [Mousavi, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and Khatami] ran the country, the United States adhered to a regime change policy, but now America officially announces that it does not have a regime change policy for Iran.” His point was that his more assertive foreign policy had cost less and reaped more benefits than Iran’s previous detente-type policies. In the same debate, Mousavi charged that the current policies “damage the dignity of Iran, tarnish its reputation, and cause lots of tensions with other countries.” He argued that the consequences of Ahmadinezhad’s defiant foreign policy would be devastating for Iran. The United States, then, has an interest in proving Mousavi correct and Ahmadinezhad wrong.

Still other analysts fear that when the United States and its international partners sit down with an Iranian dictatorship whose hands are freshly stained with the blood of peaceful demonstrators, the hardliners will portray such talks as a major triumph. These critics could argue that such talks signal that no matter what horrors the regime inflicts on its own citizens, the world is prepared to look the other way in a desperate effort to accommodate the Islamic Republic’s rising power. If successful, such a message would be profoundly discouraging to the opposition.

The United States has no option but to engage the Khamenei-Ahmadinezhad-IRGC government, but doing so comes with a great risk of helping the hardliners and hurting the opposition. The U.S. leadership

must therefore present the Iranian people with a detailed rationale for such an engagement. The rationale should explain, first, that resolution of the nuclear issue would benefit the Iranian people and, second, that the United States has long experience at pressing dictatorships on human rights while also urging them to compromise on geostrategic issues.

U.S. interests would be ill-served if Iranians believe engagement will enhance the hardliners’ legitimacy. That risk is greatest if Ahmadinezhad grabs center stage. Therefore, the U.S. government should eschew any high-profile meetings with Ahmadinezhad and urge other governments to do the same. The model should be Ahmadinezhad’s 2008 trip to Rome for a summit of the UN-affiliated Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). Even though the Italian government had to allow his visit, it ensured that he met with absolutely no one of substance outside the FAO event. In fact, reports suggest that Pope Benedict XVI canceled his meetings with any world leader attending the conference in order to avoid meeting Ahmadinezhad.

Fifty years ago, the United States, for geostrategic reasons, supported an autocratic Iranian government against a popular movement (the shah against the movement led by Muhammad Mossadegh). The result was disastrous for the U.S. image in the eyes of many Iranians. If the United States is to take that route again, the geostrategic gain must be as substantial as the twenty-five years of strong Cold War support the United States received from the shah.

### Human Rights: Ethics or Strategy?

A powerful ethical argument could be made for Western support of human rights in Iran. But that is not the only reason for such a policy. Even while strenuously objecting to what it saw as a “regime change” policy by the Bush administration, the *New York Times* wrote in an editorial on April 11, 2006, “The best hope for avoiding a nuclear-armed Iran lies in encouraging political evolution there over the next decade.”

During the Cold War, the United States supported Soviet and East European dissidents because it was the right thing to do. In time, such a policy was found to bring incalculable strategic gain. However, a convincing

argument could be made that U.S. support for Iranian human rights will not help reformers and could well hurt them. The problem with that argument is that Iranian leaders do not agree. As noted, Khamenei has spent twenty years warning about a possible velvet revolution provoked by foreign support for domestic dissenters. Those warnings sounded paranoid before June 12, when the ayatollah's ineptitude managed to help prompt the realization of his own greatest fears. It still seems implausible that foreign support could do much to aid dissidents in Iran, but the Iranian government fears such support more than anything else.

Although some experts on Iran confidently predict that the Islamic Republic will survive the postelection protests, others predict, with equal confidence, that Iran is entering a prerevolutionary situation eerily similar to that in 1978. Prognosticators on such matters have a miserable track record: experts on various regions have not accurately predicted a revolution in the last 200 years. They expected regime collapses that have not occurred (Cuba and North Korea) and did not foresee dramatic changes until they were well under way. When President Ronald Reagan said in June 1987, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall," the world little suspected that the Berlin Wall would fall within two and a half years. Confident predictions about the prospects for the Iranian opposition thus must be made with humility.

That said, basing policy on the expectation that the Islamic Republic will change any time soon is inappropriate. Indeed, if the present regime finds ruling the old way impossible, it is probable that, unlike the dramatic revolutionary change in 1979, Iran would see a historic compromise between the existing elite and opposition forces along the same lines of post-Franco Spain or post-Pinochet Chile. Such a compromise would presumably include a slow evolution away from the existing policies, with the privileges of the current generation of leaders preserved but power being ceded over time to democratic successors. Alternatively, it is quite possible that Iran may become a more repressive state, led by the IRGC while elected institutions are drained of power. That mixture of dictatorship and nuclear weapons would be a greater danger than nuclear weapons alone.

Whatever the future holds for Iran, the international community must be persistent and, to the extent Iranian actions allow, patient. Slowing the nuclear program to a crawl would go far in allowing for such patience. Even if Iran were to cross the bomb threshold, slowing progress could still make an important strategic difference. Iran's bombs would likely resemble North Korea's—less than a handful of weapons that work badly and cannot be carried by a missile. Pakistan, by contrast, has dozens of well-functioning bombs that can be carried by medium-range missiles.

At the moment, the Iranian regime is frightened, confused, and on the defensive. The United States should therefore do nothing that risks relieving that pressure and giving comfort to Iran's rulers. Engagement should be substantive, not high-profile meetings that accomplish little except suggesting that the current leaders' tough policies have forced the United States to change direction in a way that the reformers' softer approach did not. For the United States to stay silent on human rights out of fear of how such statements might affect negotiations is to confuse ends and means. Negotiations are a means to advance U.S. interests, not an interest in themselves. A more democratic Iran that is more respectful of human rights would serve the interests of both Americans and Iranians. Such a reality would put the two countries on a path toward resolving not only the nuclear crisis but also state support for terrorism and interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries such as Lebanon and Iraq. A democratic Iran would become a normal state rather than a revolutionary cause.

Obama entered office promising to pursue a policy of engagement with Iran that would be tough and principled. That is the right combination. But implementing the policy as announced is not easy. Diplomats are tempted to downplay U.S. principles for fear that voicing support for human rights will undercut the prospects for a nuclear deal. Giving in to that temptation could well result in the worst of all possible worlds: weakening an opposition that feels the United States betrayed it and emboldening hardliners who feel Washington is weak.

## 6 | Sanctions and the Opposition

AS MUCH AS ANYTHING can be said about the broad coalition among the various groups in the Iranian opposition, support seems to be common for sanctions against regime figures and their families. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and IRGC-connected firms are particularly disliked by the opposition for their lead role in human rights abuses. Thus, targeting them would be an especially effective way to link the nuclear program and human rights abuses as two sides of the hardliners' plans for dominating the region and the Iranian people. An individual who embodies both offenses is *basij* commander Muhammad Reza Naqdi: he is on the list of those subject to United Nations sanctions for his role in the nuclear program, and he was convicted a decade ago by a Tehran court for his role in the death of dissidents (presumably a reason he is now in charge of intimidating dissidents). Russia and China may insist that sanctions be imposed for nuclear reasons alone, but the United States and Europe could later drop strong hints that the nuclear connection was the excuse while human rights abuses were the real concern. Iranian political analysis often assumes that the stated reasons for any given action are a diversion, obscuring the true reasons. Therefore, suggesting that the real reason for sanctions (human rights) was not the stated reason (the nuclear program) may find receptive ears.

The opposition is conflicted about sanctions on anyone other than regime figures. Reformers generally agree that sanctions to date have not been useful. And those imposed by the United States and the international community have had a mixed record. They have slowed Iran's nuclear program—a considerable accomplishment—but they have not brought about positive changes in the Iranian regime's actions on the nuclear program or terrorism. And they have not hurt the economic interests of those close to the regime. For example, those around the IRGC have benefited from their ability to smuggle goods. Meanwhile, Iranians not affiliated with the regime have been hurt; for instance, students abroad with accounts at Bank

Sepah have been denied access to funds while regime figures have easily maintained accounts in European banks. Foreign media organizations have been prevented from paying their employees or purchasing essential equipment.

Few in the opposition are willing to see suffering imposed on the Iranian people as justification for ending the nuclear impasse. Such sanctions could hurt the opposition by giving the regime an excuse to crack down on the middle class, which is at the heart of the dissent. But many others believe the hardliners are so discredited that Iranians will blame them rather than the West for the imposition of sanctions. Ordinary Iranians seem prepared to endure temporary popular suffering if the sanctions could shorten the life span of the current government or the Islamic Republic. However, it is by no means clear how sanctions would facilitate domestic internal change.

As for types of sanctions, incremental sanctions can be a vaccine that lets the target develop antibodies to later, stronger sanctions. In *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered* (the 2007 third edition), the classic study of the impact of sanctions by Hufbauer et al., the authors' colorful phrasing for this point is “hammer, do not screw.” Unfortunately, that lesson from international experience with sanctions is not easy to implement.

While some diplomats insist that incremental sanctions have lost favor with respect to Iran, shocking sanctions seem implausible, if for no other reason than Russian and Chinese reluctance. The record of harsh sanctions is mixed. Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein did not change course even though Iraq was subjected to stringent economic and trade sanctions for seven years. In the end, the international community was less able to endure the suffering of the Iraqi people than was Saddam. In 1996 the UN and Iraq agreed on an expanded Oil-for-Food Program, which substantially weakened the sanctions on Iraq without any Iraqi agreement to observe the Security Council orders it was flouting. As noted in *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, “It is hard to bully a bully with economic measures.”

The authors' more general point, based on their studies of sanctions worldwide, is that those imposing sanctions should not expect them to "work as well against very large targets that are strong, stable, hostile, and autocratic." This conclusion does not augur well for the prospects of imposing sanctions on Iran.

Sanctions are sometimes adopted because no one has a better alternative to propose. This may be true in Western approaches to Iran. The prospects are poor that sanctions will change the hardliners' determination to advance their nuclear program, and even poorer that sanctions will advance the cause of human rights.

Even so, sanctions may achieve some worthwhile goals. A more realistic objective for sanctions would be to slow Iran's nuclear program, thereby buying time. Hufbauer et al. found a 37 percent success rate for sanctions imposed on autocracies to achieve military impairment, compared with a 9 percent success rate for those seeking to achieve major policy changes. Another possible goal for sanctions on Iran would be to demonstrate to any other countries that might go down Iran's path (a clandestine nuclear program and disregard for Security Council resolutions) that such a course has a high cost and a small payoff.

## 7 | Remediating a Mutual Misunderstanding

THE PROTESTORS' SLOGAN on November 3, "Obama, Obama, either you are with them or with us" reflects their concerns about the direction of U.S. policy. The worries generated by the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) deal indicate that the West, including the United States, has not effectively explained its policies to Iranians. In the U.S. view, it was not abandoning Iranian reformers by pursuing this deal. It was undertaken simply to buy time for further negotiations without making any concessions on the underlying issues under dispute, especially whether Iran would be allowed to continue uranium enrichment. In fact, the TRR deal entailed a tougher stance than the international community had taken previously. It required Iran to surrender most of the low-enriched uranium (LEU) it had already produced, whereas earlier the international community had demanded that Iran simply cease producing additional LEU.

The degree of concern generated by the TRR deal indicates that the international community, and especially the United States, has not done a good job of explaining to the Iranian people its goals and its strategy for achieving those goals. By contrast, the Obama administration has been effective at getting across other parts of its message—such as its deep commitment to engagement rather than hostility. By conveying that message, Obama has not only weakened the hardliners' "enemy narrative" but also has put them in a difficult position to justify to Iranians why the regime cannot resolve the nuclear standoff. But many Iranian protestors wonder what Obama will really do. Will he trade progress on the nuclear front for his silence on human rights?

Obama could easily adjust the tone of his messages to bring out more directly and clearly the human rights component of U.S. policy. But that task is best undertaken by means of a clear, direct campaign larded with frequent statements by the highest-level U.S. officials rather than an isolated sentence here or there from the president. Those statements will work best if they convey U.S. respect for Iranian accomplishments, with

an emphasis on human rights and democracy. One example is the remarkable Constitutional Revolution of 1906–1910, in which the people, led by the clergy, fought for democratic limits on the shah's power.

### Taking Steps to Broaden Engagement

To broaden the scope of its engagement, the United States should take several steps in parallel with any talks with Iran's leadership.

First and most important, the United States should elevate the international profile of Iranian human rights abuses. Washington could use major international forums such as the UN General Assembly or bilateral or multilateral meetings with Iranian opposition activists to move the issue of human rights in Iran higher on the international agenda. In recent years Canada has taken the lead in the UN General Assembly discussion of human rights abuses in Iran. The United States should lobby in support of the Canadian effort. In the November 2009 vote in the Third Committee (composed of all General Assembly members), for the first time Saudi Arabia joined in the condemnation of Iranian human rights abuses. The United States should seek the support of such a resolution by more Middle Eastern and Muslim-majority countries.

Members of the U.S. executive branch and Congress, as well as prominent private citizens, could also help to raise the international profile of Iranian human rights abuses. Making available administration officials, and encouraging members of Congress, to speak at meetings concerning such abuses is an excellent way to have an impact. Such modest steps are likely to draw the attention of the Iranian people.

Second, although cultural exchanges reach only a small number of the Iranian elite, the indirect impact of exchanges may be far greater. Visits by sports teams, such as the visit by the Iranian national basketball team in May 2008 to Salt Lake City, receive a great deal of attention in Iran. Because members of the Iranian cultural elite are boycotting official events such as book fairs, film festivals, and poetry awards, their willingness

to tour the United States would send a valuable message to ordinary Iranians. Offers for such visits, even if they are in the end frustrated by suspicious hardliners in Iran, are well worthwhile because they contribute to the narrative that the problem in U.S.-Iranian relations lies in Tehran, not Washington.

Third, that narrative can be further reinforced by publicizing offers made to the Iranian regime. Private overtures and discussions are vital to diplomacy, but they can also give rise to suspicion and apprehension in Iran and the region. Even though the Iranian regime will be opaque, the Obama administration should be as transparent as possible in the course of any negotiations with Iran, in part to give the Iranian people a clear picture of what the regime is refusing. In the same vein, the United States and the P5+1 countries should publicize widely any incentives they offer Iran.

### **Pursuing a Collaborative Approach**

In the postelection atmosphere, the U.S. government has an improved opportunity to work closely with European governments and civil society organizations to advance human rights and democracy in Iran. The mood in Europe, especially among intellectuals, has shifted sharply since the June 12 presidential election in Iran. Disgust at human rights abuses in the Islamic Republic is more marked, and the hostility toward the U.S. government has waned significantly since Obama took office. Within this climate, the message that the West cares about the regime's threatening behavior—both its threats to the Iranian people and to the region—is more credible if it is sent by both Europe and America than if it is sent by either alone.

Iranian hardliners will portray any U.S. statements about human rights as proof that the United States is pursuing a regime change policy. Indeed, the hardliners are already vigorously promoting that view. They have arrested journalists and harassed the families of the bloggers and other activists who live abroad. Many Iranians have been embarrassed by the show trials, with their obviously coerced confessions. Street protests are blamed by Tehran on plots hatched in European embassies (and on foreign intellectuals, some of them long dead), propaganda from the BBC, and nefarious

activities by nongovernmental organizations. The hardliners' hints that they may purge the universities, including closing down the social sciences and humanities faculties, appall many apolitical Iranians. And the constant warnings about the possibility of a velvet revolution have put the hardliners in the position of the boy who repeatedly cried wolf—they have lost credibility. In that context, it is hard to see how their stance will change much in response to U.S. statements about human rights. Those hardliners who are suspicious of U.S. intentions will find proof of their fears in the normal activities of journalists and universities, no matter what the U.S. government does or does not say.

In many other countries, the U.S. government has conveyed its message by working with local civil society groups. But it is unrealistic to expect the Obama administration to vigorously pursue this approach. The Bush program aimed at supporting Iranian civil society groups was highly controversial in both Iran and the United States. The Iranian government portrayed these efforts as proving that the true U.S. strategy was regime change, not resolving the nuclear impasse. Some Iranian activists believed the Bush program was catastrophic for Iranians who cooperated in such efforts, because it allowed the hardliners to paint the civil society activists as traitors. The initiative generated opposition in the United States as well; it was much criticized by congressional Democrats and unpopular among professional diplomats.

After its review of U.S. Iran policy, the Obama administration apparently decided that it should phase out some programs, though cultural exchanges will certainly continue. But it is unrealistic to expect the Obama administration to undertake bold initiatives in these areas. After all, Obama's priority is to make a new beginning on Iran that demonstrates U.S. reasonableness and deflates the hardliners' "enemy narrative." He simply will not put his approach at risk by adopting policies that resemble those of the Bush era and that, as judged by his team, have been ineffective, if not counterproductive, in the past.

And yet it would be wrong to ignore the role civil society organizations can play. They can widen the pipe—that is, open a greater variety of channels to

reach ordinary Iranians with the information needed to counter the regime's mischaracterizations of Western activities and intentions. A great strength of the popular protest movement has been its adaptability, allowing it to use a wide range of new media to spread information. Western governments should urge a broad array of civil society organizations to assist their Iranian counterparts. The West has a vital interest in Iran's evolution toward a richer, more open civil society. Such a society is much more likely to be a force for stability and prosperity than for revolutionary violence. The more channels conveying information, the harder it is for the regime to close them all down.

As for the hardliners, they make wild accusations that the activities of Western civil society organizations are part of a unified plot led by Western governments to spur a velvet revolution. The hardliners' crazy exaggerations have made the Iranian people skeptical that there is anything nefarious about the activities of civil society groups, even if supported by Western governments. A striking reflection of the changed attitudes is that the BBC—an obvious arm of a Western government—has become at least as important a news source for the Iranian people as the state-run television, which

in internal reports acknowledges its viewership is off by 40 percent since June 12.

Because of lingering suspicions among Iranians from the Bush era, the U.S. government would best be advised to take a backseat in efforts to work with civil society groups. With Washington's encouragement, the leading role could be assumed by friendly governments that want to be more active in resolving the impasses with Iran. Smaller countries may be optimally suited to this task—especially those outside Europe.

Emerging from these new circumstances would be a U.S. policy that encourages U.S. and international civil society groups such as labor unions and media outlets to undertake Iran-related activities. U.S. government funding poses problems, whereas a focus on assistance may be better received. Many Iranian civil society groups would be delighted to have U.S. officials available to speak at and participate in their activities, and such gestures could make as much of a difference as government funding. Efforts along these lines would be most effective if they reach across the U.S. government so that Iranian trade unionists meet with U.S. labor experts, Iranian bloggers meet with computer security specialists, and so on.

## 8 | Conclusion

THE PROSPECTS FOR either a peaceful resolution to the nuclear standoff or for peaceful evolution toward a more democratic Iran are poor. And these two issues—the nuclear program and the move toward democracy—are largely viewed separately in Iran. Of them, the nuclear impasse is central to the West and secondary to the Iranian opposition, whereas the promotion of democracy is central to the Iranian opposition and secondary to the West, especially the U.S. government. Thus, the U.S. government should expect little from the opposition on the nuclear impasse, and the Iranian opposition should expect little from the U.S. government in promoting democracy in Iran. It would be much better for all concerned to exceed limited expectations rather than fail to meet ambitious ones.

That said, modest steps by the U.S. government to express concerns about human rights and democracy would have a noticeable impact. At the least, such steps would reduce the concerns of Iranian protestors that Washington intends to sell them out—that is, confer international legitimacy on the hardliners in return for a nuclear compromise. Such modest U.S. steps would have an even greater impact if they reinforced Iranians' conviction that the world respects and admires their democratic drive. Iranians might then take their protests against repression to a higher level. An Iran in which the hardliners and the opposition pursue a historic compromise, such as that in

post-Franco Spain or post-Pinochet Chile, would be much better for the Iranian people and for the West than an Iran under the thumb of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Similarly modest steps by the Iranian opposition—such as maintaining silence on any proposed compromises on nuclear issues—could help relieve the policy paralysis in Tehran that is preventing any serious negotiation. If the nuclear issue is removed from the highly partisan atmosphere now prevailing in Iran, policymakers may be able to consider more seriously the offers made by the international community. And, conceivably, some in Iran may argue that the stiff-necked nuclear stance has not been worth the price Iran has paid. It also would be useful if some in the opposition went even further by suggesting that the incentives offered by the international community would actually benefit Iran. But that may be a bridge too far to cross.

The more the hardliners in control in Tehran are afraid of the opposition, the more likely they are to agree to a deal with the international community. And they have much to fear. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei worries about the Western cultural invasion for good reason: many Iranians want globalization—culturally, economically, and politically. Globalization would be good for the Iranian people and for the world. Nothing done to resolve the nuclear impasse should impede that cultural invasion or compel Iranians to doubt the world's interest in their cause.

# Appendix | Speech by Hossein Bastani

## 2009 Weinberg Founders Conference (Transcript)

IN THE WAKE OF the October 1, 2009, talks in Geneva, many Iran analysts have questioned the impact of the Geneva agreement on the future of ties between Iran and the West, in particular on the [fate of the] nuclear issue.

Before presenting any kind of analysis, allow me to allude to a report carried October 4 by the most influential conservative newspaper in Iran, *Kayhan* daily, whose editor-in-chief is directly appointed by the leader of the Islamic Republic. This report actually sheds light on how the supporters of the [Iranian] administration view the Geneva talks and how they feed it to their own supporters and to the Iranian people.

Based on this report, at the start of the [Geneva] talks, P5+1 representatives asked Iranian negotiator and secretary of Iran's National Security Council Mr. Saeed Jalili about Iran's standpoint on the proposal to lift all international sanctions slapped on Iran in return for Iran's suspension of uranium enrichment. In response, Mr. Jalili smiled in contempt and, addressing the P5+1 representatives, said they were novice and inexperienced and unaware of the history of the negotiations.

Mr. Jalili then asked [former secretary-general of the Council of the European Union] Mr. [Javier] Solana if he had explained to the P5+1 representatives that Iran had set this discussion behind and would never talk about uranium enrichment. Then he explained to the delegations that reaching an agreement on the Islamic Republic's proposed package is on the agenda rather than uranium enrichment.

These are examples of post-Geneva-talks publicity in Iran. In other words, [President Mahmoud] Ahmadinezhad's administration has used the Geneva talks [as a means] to prove to the people of Iran that its policies are not dangerous, that everything is under control, and that there is no crisis. Whether a crisis induced by

Ahmadinezhad administration policies exists in Iran or not is a key factor in swaying the Islamic Republic toward pursuing or abandoning these policies.

Allow me to present an example: Addressing Tehran's Friday prayer sermons in August, head of the Expediency Council Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani put forth a proposal to free the country from the [current] crisis. He declared the country crisis-ridden and noted that some elites are devising a proposal to stave off the crisis. Ahmadinezhad, however, replied that there was no crisis to require any strategies to overcome it.

A year ago, too, before the presidential elections, the same debates were rife in Iran. At that time, a number of influential conservatives—I am not talking of reformists only—were having open deliberations on forming a national unity government, news of which was carried by the [domestic] press.

They contended that the country was facing a crisis that required a national unity government to come to power to stave off. This meant reaching an agreement on nominating someone other than Mr. Ahmadinezhad. And they were talking about a conservative political figure, specifically former foreign minister Mr. Ali Akbar Velayati, who is in good standing with Ayatollah Khamenei. They spoke about establishing a national unity government and having another candidate run in the [June] 2009 [presidential] elections who could remove the crisis at home and abroad and improve the administration's relations with the Iranian people and the international community.

At that time too, Mr. Ahmadinezhad's supporters declared there was no crisis to require any such measures. They succeeded in convincing Ayatollah Khamenei, who is the ultimate decisionmaker in Iran, that this proposal was not a good idea, as the country was not on the brink of a crisis. Ayatollah Khamenei subsequently informed the conservatives of his opposition to the plan

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to create a national unity government, and the proposal was stymied. The indirect result of this move was that the government reached a consensus on Mr. Ahmadinezhad coming to power [as president] again. All conservatives had to support him, and he became president for a second term. And we are aware that his policies are conducive to continued crises [in Iran].

Ultimately, it is of paramount importance for the Ahmadinezhad administration and its supporters to prove that the country is not facing a crisis as a result of policies it has adopted. In view of this, any move by the international community and the West that would enable Ahmadinezhad to prove that the country is not facing a crisis would actually bolster him and the hardliners. We can analyze moves such as [participation in] the Geneva talks from this perspective. If these talks and similar deliberations enable Mr. Ahmadinezhad and his supporters inside the country to prove to other decisionmakers in the Islamic Republic that everything is under control and proceeding smoothly, and that there is no crisis, they will become more adamant to pursue their past policies.

As an example, I would like to draw your attention to three years ago, when the P5+1 group offered its first package to Iran. At the time, state-run media centered on publicity that [former president Muhammad] Khatami's reformist administration talked about detente and normalization of relations with the West, and the result was Iran being named one of the countries of the "axis of evil." They contended that those policies were not successful and added that they—namely, the Ahmadinezhad administration—are uncompromising toward the international community, and the result is that the international community is making offers that were never presented to previous administrations. State-run media were actually alluding to the package presented to Iran by the P5+1 group, noting that never before has any Iranian administration received such offers. They noted that they were given this package because they were uncompromising and argued, as a result, that they had adopted the right policies.

They argued that those who believe that Ahmadinezhad's policies are causing a crisis for the country are mistaken, since these policies are successful, as proven

by the West [offering incentives to his administration]. In view of this, the first lesson we can derive from the recent talks and from Mr. Ahmadinezhad's past history with the West is that any behavior that would help Ahmadinezhad prove that he is in control and that, through his hardline policies, he is bringing the international community to its knees and getting concessions will strengthen the dangerous policies that Mr. Ahmadinezhad's administration has so far enforced.

The second point that I would like to stress is that any possible future talks with the Ahmadinezhad administration should take into account the people's postelection protest movement against the government. The importance of the Green Movement [of Iran] should not be ignored in any dialogues and relations with the Ahmadinezhad administration.

I would like to explain why this movement is of paramount importance. On June 15, namely three days after the recent presidential elections [in Iran], a group of protestors came to Tehran's streets. According to Tehran's conservative mayor, Mr. [Muhammad Baqer] Qalibaf, three million protestors came to the streets [in Tehran]. Mr. Qalibaf made the remarks at the Iranian parliament in order to explain to the MPs how grave the situation was. After the [recent] elections, there were at least three different instances in which million-strong protestors appeared on the streets.

Allow me to compare this to the past. Before the recent elections—say, in President Khatami's era—the highest number of protestors that the reformist groups rallied was in May 1998, which marked the first anniversary of Mr. Khatami's presidential election win. At the time, all reformist groups invited the people to assemble at Tehran University, and the turnout was between 40,000 and 50,000. This was the highest number of people that the reformists could rally to come out to the streets.

Compare this figure to the three million people who came to the streets in protest after the recent elections. I provided this example to show you the importance of the Green Movement. This turnout is unparalleled in the past three decades in Iran.

Many Westerners might ask, well, the Green Movement's victory is important to the Iranian people, but

why would it be important for the West? [They would go on to say] that Iranian people's interests dictate that the Ahmadinezhad administration be held back, but would this be to the West's best interests? I believe that the interests of the Iranian people and the international community merge at this point. Allow me to explain that if the Ahmadinezhad administration is able to promote its perilous and irresponsible policies with regard to the nuclear issue and other issues in the Middle East, it is simply because this administration does not need the votes of the Iranian people.

This government has not come to power through democratic elections and does not need democratic and free elections to retain its power. It wins elections by recourse to fraud and rigging. As a result, this administration has no regard for how concerned the Iranian people are with the impacts of its national and international policies. The people of Iran, like any other people around the globe, do not want their country to face enormous international crises that would negatively impact their lives.

If a government needs the votes of the people, it will have to meet their demands. But Ahmadinezhad's administration does not feel it needs people's votes and, therefore, does whatever it wants in the realm of national and international policies. Two years ago, Mr. Ahmadinezhad made remarks about international sanctions and UN resolutions, remarks that are well known to the people of Iran. He said, "Let the Westerners issue sanction upon sanction until they kill themselves." Let me repeat it in this way to enable [simultaneous] translation: Tell the Westerners to issue resolution after resolution until they kill themselves.

Why would he say this? The reason is, if his policies result in numerous other resolutions against Iran, the people's living conditions would deteriorate and prices of commodities would soar threefold—he does not care because he does not need people's votes. But if he needed the constituency and needed the people's votes, he would not speak like this. He would, in that case, devise his international and national policies in a way that would keep the people happy so that they would vote for him again.

The people of Iran are, therefore, dissatisfied with this administration's foreign policy. I do not want to say here that the people of Iran support or do not support Israel. Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East are not the basic concerns of the Iranian people. Their prime concern, rather, is their day-to-day lives, and they know that the policies of Mr. Ahmadinezhad are actually undermining their personal lives. [They are worried that] there will be more sanctions that would result in higher escalating prices, lower standards of living, and increased dictatorship. People are sensitive toward these issues, so they do not approve of the foreign policies adopted by Mr. Ahmadinezhad's administration.

You have noticed Iranian people chanting numerous slogans in this regard following the June 12 elections. One of the slogans chanted during the recent protests was "Neither Gaza, nor Lebanon. [I give] my life for Iran." People who chanted these slogans were not pro- or anti-Israel. They were just saying that they had priorities at the national level that were of consequence to them, and [that] they wanted to rebel against the policies of Mr. Ahmadinezhad, who seems to usually attach more importance to some regional issues rather than the life and sustenance of the people at home.

I have noticed that some Western analysts stress that the leaders of the Green Movement should determine their stance on matters such as the nuclear issue or the issue of Palestine and Israel. They attach utmost importance to hearing something from the leaders of the Green Movement on their foreign policy and on how they want to change Iran's policy toward Israel and Palestine.

Allow me to remind you that this is not a realistic expectation. Granted that these leaders make a remark to the effect that Iran's foreign policy is going to change, this of itself would not bear an impact. If we pin hope on mere words, then we should perhaps support Mr. Ahmadinezhad's administration, since it constantly makes such [promising] remarks. Ahmadinezhad's first vice president, Rahim Mashaei, recently talked about friendship with the people of Israel. Would this give any kind of promise and hope to anyone? Should we be confident that Mr. Ahmadinezhad's Middle East policies are going to be good [going forward]?

Well, if we want to take words at face value, then we have to support Mr. Ahmadinezhad because he says a lot of pretty things. But these are not important for the Iranian people, since they want a government that needs people's votes to come to power, as I stressed previously.

The important consideration is that the Green Movement in Iran follows the needs and demands of the people. The leaders of the Green Movement do not tell people what to do. They rather adapt themselves to the wishes and whims of the people, and these are the people who have concerns, first and foremost, for domestic issues. These are people who are concerned about the prices they have to pay for the dangerous foreign policies of Mr. Ahmadinezhad; and at home, many other critics of the administration are concerned with the same issues.

Many critics of Ahmadinezhad's foreign policy, including the Green Movement leaders, are of the opinion that this government has adopted regional and international policies and pursues objectives pertaining to the nuclear issue and the Near East that are not going to be feasible and actually create more problems for the country.

Let me provide an example from the Iran-Iraq War. Many people who opposed the continuation of the Iran-Iraq War and wanted peace were not making these demands because they were followers or supporters of Saddam Hussein. They argued rather that this was a dangerous war for the country. The same is tenable for Iran right now. The leaders of the Green Movement present stances and standpoints about the Middle East, Israel, and Palestine; nonetheless, they are concerned about the continuation of Mr. Ahmadinezhad's policies, and this is what differentiates their policies from those of Mr. Ahmadinezhad.

The final point that I would like to underscore is that Mr. Ahmadinezhad's administration and supporters are by far more dangerous for the region and the world as compared with the reformists and with other conservatives in Iran. As a consequence, now that the Green Movement is effectively combating this government inside the country, it is important not only for the Iranians but also for the whole world that this movement come to fruit.

Let me direct your attention to the deterrent theory pursued by the supporters of Mr. Ahmadinezhad's administration, namely the political and security think tanks that back this administration. They believe in certain dos and don'ts in order to support the Islamic Republic in the face of Western enemies. This lays the foundation for their policies toward the nuclear issue as well. For example, they are of the opinion that any agreement with the international community is dangerous. And why do they think so? Because they contend that agreements with the international community have adverse effects.

They provide the example of Iraq. The military-security supporters of Mr. Ahmadinezhad have conducted extensive research on Iraq. One of the lessons they have derived from the case of Iraq is that Saddam attempted for more than a decade to win the confidence of the international community, and for more than a decade, international organizations tried to find and dismantle dangerous weapons in Iraq.

After a decade, the international community was convinced that Iraq did not have any important weapons to defend itself. This realization was followed by the U.S. invasion of Iraq and subsequent ouster of Saddam. Finally, they said, well, there was a mistake and Iraq did not produce weapons of mass destruction. But this did not help Saddam Hussein, because his regime was toppled. The lesson that Ahmadinezhad's team learns from this example is that they should not repeat this experience and that normalization of relations with [the] international community leads to collapse of the regime, just as in the case of Saddam Hussein and the ultimate downfall of his regime.

The military-security supporters of Ahmadinezhad's administration, therefore, disapprove of any agreement with the international community because they feel threatened by it. Under the present conditions, it seems as if they adjusted their tone of voice at the Geneva talks, but we should bear in mind that this adjustment and supposed leniency was mainly due to pressures from inside Iran caused by the protest movements, and as such the administration did not feel it had the support of the people and wanted to control

the tension with the international community, at least in the short term.

Please keep in mind that if there is no pressure from the Green Movement and from the protest movement of the Iranian people in the future, the administration will revert to its hardline stances. And this is where the importance of the Green Movement comes to the fore for both you and us. If the Green Movement fails, the Ahmadinezhad administration will not feel the need to give any concessions during nuclear talks or in general to the international community. They will only give concessions if they feel pressured at the national level, and this is what happened to some extent during the postelection days. As soon as it feels that the Green Movement has been undermined, the administration

will adopt more conservative stances. And because of the reason I mentioned, they do not want to have any agreements with the West, as they feel it undermines the regime.

I would like to conclude by saying that I'm not confident that these kinds of negotiations between Mr. Ahmadinezhad's administration and the international community would create a dramatic change. But I'm confident that there is a major change that has appeared in the past months, and that is the protest movement of the Iranian people, which, I am confident, can culminate in further important changes. If the Green Movement fails, its negative impacts will affect not only the Iranians but also the international community.

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