

CHAPTER 4

THE PROSPECTS FOR REGIME CHANGE IN IRAN

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The people are very dissatisfied, and they are right to be so, and I swear to God that the society is on the brink of explosion. If this discontent increases, as is the case, the regime will be threatened.

Ayatollah Ebrahim Amini
Assembly of Experts
(Power to Appoint
Supreme Leader) 2002

Introduction.

The question before us today is: What are the prospects of Iran's revolutionary government giving way to reform or overthrow over the next 10-20 years? Furthermore, and more importantly for the United States, what groups and forces within Iran are opposed to the current revolutionary government and/or its efforts to develop nuclear power and long-range strategic weapons systems?

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that **Iran's revolutionary government can be overthrown within 2 years** should the United States adopt a more robust policy of empowering the Iranian people to change the regime in Tehran. A regime change in Iran would put an immediate end to Iran's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and instead focus the efforts of the new secular government on the domestic priority of pulling Iran out of its current Third World status. Equally important, the demise of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the hands of the Iranian people would send a very powerful message to the rest of the Muslim world that Islam, as a form of governance, has failed. The failure of political Islam would be a victory for the United States and our war against Islamic fundamentalism.

The end result of a more robust policy on Iran would allow

President Bush to look the American people in the eyes and state the following: "On September 11, 2001, an arc of tyranny and dictatorship stretched from Afghanistan through Iran into Iraq. Today, an arc of freedom rules in Kabul, Tehran, and Baghdad. And the world is a safer and better place as are the peoples of Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq."

Iran: Challenge and Opportunity.

Militant Islam is today's engine of international terror. Islamist schools breed a new militant generation, Islamist sermons mobilize opinion against the free world, Islamist ideology legitimizes recourse to terror and Islamist "charities" bankroll the global network of terror. While most Muslim states are aware of this threat to the world and their own stability, there is one that is actually governed by Islamists: The Islamic Republic of Iran.

Therefore, the principal component of the war against terrorism should be the war against *militant* Islam, which over the last 20 decades has been inspired, nurtured, and funded by the Islamic Government of Iran. The demise of the clerical regime in Iran would go a long way in "draining the swamp" of militancy and radicalism in the broader Muslim world with enormous geopolitical consequences for U.S. national security interests. Therefore, the permanent success of this campaign rests on a regime change in Iran.

In short, the United States faces two immediate timelines: one, the mullahs' access to a nuclear bomb, and the other, institutionalization of democracy through a regime change. The fundamental goal of U.S. foreign policy should be the acceleration of the regime change timeline.

In many respects, the people of Iran face a similar set of timelines. The choices facing Iran over the next 10-20 years are simple: a country relegated to permanent Third World status with a nuclear bomb or an advanced, modern, secular country at peace with itself and its neighbors.

The geopolitical interests of the United States coincide with the interests of a majority of Iranians: a fundamental change in the nature of the regime in Tehran. The overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran is good for America and good for the Iranian people. Therefore,

Washington's strategy should be to support those forces inside and outside Iran which share America's political, economic, military, and geopolitical vision for the region. Towards this end, the United States must continue to isolate the clerical regime and encourage the growing spirit of rebellion among the repressed Iranians.

Assumptions.

1. Unwilling to pursue serious dialogue on normalizing relations with Washington, Tehran's foreign policy goal instead is to defeat the U.S.-led sanctions policy and to only engage the U.S. private sector (American energy companies, in particular). For this purpose, the apologists for the clerical regime have established well-funded "nonprofit" entities within the United States to soften Washington's tough stance against the clerical establishment.

2. Led by the 50 million youth, the demand for reform in Iran created President Khatami in 1997. In fact, the reform movement was created by the mass demand for change. However, his inability to deliver has broadened the mass discontent and accelerated the implosion of the clerical regime. The historic election of 1997 was a clear signal to the clerical establishment that Iranians want the freedom to live and prosper without "divine intervention," and that they want an end to their country's international isolation.

3. Despite official denunciations, a reservoir of goodwill toward America exist among a majority of Iranians. The people of Iran would welcome America's principled, transparent and vocal support of the movement for democracy and rule-of-law in their country. Therefore, U.S. policy should not be held hostage to the history of U.S.-Iranian relations and events surrounding 1953. As far as a majority of freedom-loving Iranians are concerned, 1953 is history. Washington must overcome this ingrained psychological barrier, created in large measure by U.S. and Iranian academics of the left and self-loathing businessmen and journalists dependent upon Iranian visas and access (see section on U.S.-Iranian ties).

4. Irrespective of who is President of Iran, the Islamic Republic's constitution specifically rejects popular sovereignty and puts ultimate power in the hands of the Supreme Leader, un-elected by the people and answerable only to "Allah."

5. The popular overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran will send a very powerful message to the entire Muslim world—Islam does not solve the socio-economic problems that are at their root internal: poverty and corruption, suppression, absence of democracy, and economic opportunity.

Public Opinion in Iran.

In August of 2002, the Tarrance Group conducted a poll of public opinion in Tehran. This research project—the first of its kind—was designed to fulfill two main objectives: a) provide a broad assessment of the social, economic, and political landscape of Iran; and b) determine whether or not Iranians believe in a fundamental change of the political system in Iran.

The findings from this survey validate stories that have recently been reported by international news agencies about a growing level of dissatisfaction within Iran towards the current regime. One finding in particular best summarizes the current mood in Iran: 63 percent of respondents believe that freedom and economic opportunity can only come as a result of "a fundamental change" in Iran's system of government. Agreement with this viewpoint exceeds 50 percent among every major demographic group and is highest among those who rely on satellite television and the internet for information about issues facing Iran (72 percent and 75 percent respectively).

Along the same line, 71 percent of respondents indicate that they would support a national referendum that allows the people of Iran to decide what system of government is best for the country. Once again, this is something that transcends all demographic categories.

The mounting frustration within Iran's citizenry can partially be attributed to the facts that only one-in-three respondents (33 percent) feel that Khatami has delivered on his campaign promises, and there is little expectation that things will change during his remaining 3 years in office. While 29 percent of respondents say

Khatami is capable of bringing reform, a plurality (41 percent) of Iranians believe that it is time for a new approach.

The maximum support the regime gets is between 15 to 19 percent. The cross tabs indicate that this level of support is from respondents whose families have clerical ties.

In what comes as a rejection of the regime's 23 years of hostility against the exiled Iranian community, 72 percent of those surveyed would welcome the involvement of Iranians living abroad in helping to rebuild their homeland. Moreover, just one-in-four respondents (25 percent) are of the opinion that history will judge the "founder of modern Iran" unfavorably; a finding that essentially means that the Pahlavi era is well regarded by many despite the regime's attempt to convince people otherwise.

In conclusion, the majority of Iranians living in Tehran want to see fundamental changes in the way their country is governed. People feel that the clerics have gone too far and overstepped their traditional role, and that the country would be better served if they were not directly in charge of the government. Part of the solution—as supported by a decisive majority of survey respondents—is to hold a "free, fair, and transparent national referendum," allowing the people of Iran to select the system of government that they desire.

History of U.S.-Iranian Relations.

Much of the policymaking community in Washington has held back from making aggressive policy recommendations towards the clerical regime. This is the result of a complete misreading of the broad outlines of our country's relations with Iran. The United States has nothing to apologize for concerning its relations with Iran. In fact, America's timely interventions preserved Iran's territorial integrity and prevented that country from falling behind the "Iron Curtain."

President Bush should begin his assessment of U.S.-Iranian policy with an objective look at the history of relations between Washington and Tehran. By gaining a historical perspective on U.S.-Iranian relations, President Bush would understand that while officials of the Islamic regime have been lecturing America on what Washington has done wrong, the United States was not always seen as an enemy of Iran's national interests.

America's first attempt at helping Iran was in 1911, when London and St. Petersburg were manipulating the debt-ridden Qajar dynasty. Morgan Shuster, an official of the U.S. Treasury Department, was appointed financial advisor by the Iranian government to prevent the strangling of an impoverished Iran by Britain and Russia. Unfortunately, Britain and Russia succeeded in sabotaging his mission.

In 1925, after a bloodless coup supported by the military, Reza Shah Pahlavi assumed the throne and embarked on the modernization of Iran with the help of American advisors. This attempt to bring Iran into the 20th century ended with the onset of World War II.

In 1941, Soviet troops reoccupied northern Iran, once again threatening its sovereignty. From 1941 to 1946, the Soviet Union, with the support of the KGB-infiltrated Iranian communist party, began to dismember Iran by creating a second "Republic of Azerbaijan" on the Iranian side of the border. When the war ended, Soviet troops refused to leave northern Iran. Iran then appealed to the United Nations, and America forcefully supported Iran's right to independence. Meanwhile, George Allen, then American ambassador to Iran and an ardent supporter of its autonomy, was arguing for more direct American assistance. The result was an ultimatum from President Harry S Truman to Josef Stalin to get out of Iran. The Soviets withdrew, and Iran was saved from disappearing behind the Iron Curtain.

During his CNN debut, Iran's President Mohammad Khatami focused on the 1953 coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq. Khatami charged that the ousting of Mossadeq and the Shah's return to power with Washington's assistance was a major contaminator of U.S.-Iranian relations. The truth is more complex. Until 1953, the United States had supported Mossadeq, particularly when Britain attempted to remove him because he was viewed as a threat to British oil interests in Iran. By 1953, however, Mossadeq's policies had brought Iran to the brink of financial ruin. Iran's communist party—already strong among the industrial working class, intellectuals, students, and army officers—further extended its influence during this period. The Soviet flag and Stalin's pictures

appeared in the streets of Tehran. Concerns about the communist threat to Iran forced America to act against Mossadeq's increasingly authoritarian tactics and in favor of the Shah. Once again, America's timely intervention—which, ironically, was supported by the clerics at the time due to their dislike of atheistic communism—saved Iran from falling under Soviet domination.

The one episode in this long history that stands out as a policy mistake occurred in 1964, when the U.S. Department of Defense pushed for, and got, full immunity from prosecution for all American personnel stationed in Iran. Iranians, irrespective of their political ideology, were outraged. This policy mistake gave an unknown cleric named Ruhollah Khomeini a national issue on which to rise to power: "They have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of a dog." On November 4, 1964, Khomeini was exiled from Iran for his remarks, and on the same day 15 years later, he sanctioned the attack on the American embassy.

During the 1970s, Washington's military alliance with Tehran was a major deterrent to Saddam Hussein's designs on Iran and the Persian Gulf. This mutually beneficial alliance came to an abrupt end with the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its rejection of so many things American. Emboldened by the sudden disappearance of the Shah, Hussein invaded Iran in 1980. The people of Iran paid dearly for their government's anti-American policy—one million died, and millions more were wounded.

The taking of 52 American diplomats hostage by Iranian students in 1979 and the subsequent Algiers Agreement that ended this hostage crisis in 1980, is used by some within the policymaking community as a basis for refraining from adopting a policy of regime change. The Algiers Agreement calls for "noninterference" by Washington in the internal affairs of Iran. It is the opinion of this writer that Iranian-sponsored acts of terrorism against the United States overseas render this document's clause pertaining to "noninterference" as null and void. Furthermore, America's national security paradigm has changed significantly since the tragedy of September 11, 2001. We cannot allow any rogue nation, including Islamic Iran, to develop a nuclear bomb and blackmail and/or threaten the United States and our allies in the region.

With this long history in mind, the United States should not invest its diplomatic and political energies in apologizing for recent “past mistakes” in exchange for normalization of relations with Tehran, or refrain from adopting a more robust policy towards those responsible for the murder of Americans. Instead, Washington must take the high moral ground and lend its unwavering support to empowering the people of Iran for a regime change.

Implications of Regime Change.

The geopolitical and economic consequences of a regime change in Iran and an end to that country’s pursuit of a nuclear bomb are as follows.

- The cornerstone of U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf is the uninterrupted exploration, development, and transportation of oil and gas to international markets. A regime change in Iran would significantly enhance this long-standing U.S. policy.
- Enhance the stability and security of Washington’s Persian Gulf allies. Countries like Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Kuwait would breathe easier knowing that the geopolitical vacuum created by the fall of Saddam Hussein would not be filled by Islamic Iran. Bahrain would feel less threatened knowing that Islamic Iran would not manipulate and encourage the Shi’a of Bahrain to challenge King Hamad’s reforms. The Amir of Qatar would not have to worry about a nuclear accident threatening the massive liquified natural gas (LNG) infrastructure built to market natural gas to markets worldwide. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) might finally find a receptive government in Tehran willing to compromise on the three disputed islands of Abu Musa and the Bigger and Lesser Tombs.
- Decouple Russia from its military, diplomatic, and geopolitical ally in Tehran. The new Iranian government would have very little justification for pursuing a relationship with the Russian

Federation and, in fact, might view its relations with Russia through a new competitive context; namely, competing with Russia for pursuit of customers in the worldwide natural gas markets.

- The nascent government of Afghanistan would no longer have to be concerned over Iranian adventurism within its borders. This would increase the chances for stability and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan. A Kabul-Tehran axis defined by cooperation and alliance with the United States could only enhance stability in that part of the world and rout out remaining elements of al-Qaeda and Taliban.
- Images of millions of Iranians marching through the streets of Iran chanting “Death to the Islamic Republic” broadcast across the Muslim world would be nothing less than a historic earthquake of enormous proportion. The rejection of Islam as a form of governance would impact Iran’s neighbors Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq immediately. The question that would be asked throughout the Muslim world would be “Why, why have Iranians rejected Islam?” Pakistan’s increasingly radicalized Islamic politics, Turkey’s new Islamic Party, the Shi’a of Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia and Egypt’s underground Islamic cells would all be impacted.
- Regime change in Iran would put an immediate end to support for Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, al-Qaeda, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). The new Iran would cut off all ties to these terrorist organizations out of principle but more importantly out of economic necessity. Iran’s meager resources would be devoted to rebuilding Iran.
- The first diplomatic act of a new, secular, and free Iran would be to recognize Israel’s right to exist. Throwing Iran’s diplomatic weight behind Israel would further isolate the Arab world and its intransigence towards Israel.

- An Iran that is focused on developing its vast oil and gas resources in the Persian Gulf would allow for a more rational exploitation of the Caspian Sea hydrocarbon resources. A pro-American Iran willing to act as a stable corridor would add multiple pipeline options for the transport of Caspian Sea oil and gas to international markets.
- Beyond geopolitical considerations, President Bush should indicate to the Iranian people that America is ready once again to be Iran's partner in prosperity. Both sides would have much to gain. Iran's more than 70 million people would once again constitute a market for American goods and services. American energy companies would have the chance to invest in Iran's vast hydrocarbon resources. In short, economic engagement can lay the foundations for a return to normalcy in U.S.-Iran relations.

What Needs to be Done.

Within Iran, the youth that make up a majority of the population, journalists of reformist newspapers, clerics who question the legitimacy of the Supreme Leader, and women who are at the forefront of defying the ruling theocrats are Washington's natural allies. Engagement and collaboration between these groups and America should be the cornerstone of U.S. policy towards Iran.

However, a fundamental problem facing U.S. policy towards Iran is the lack of available resources to fund projects in support of freedom and democracy in Iran. As a result, a significant vacuum exists in U.S. policy towards Iran that is unfortunately being filled by apologists for the Islamic Republic of Iran in the United States. The cost of empowering the Iranian people to change their regime (over a 2-year timetable) should not exceed \$200 million. (Note: The Department of Defense (DoD) spends \$3.6 billion/month on operations in Iraq and \$700 million/month on operations in Afghanistan.)

Adequate funding of projects that are inline with the broader U.S. policy objectives outlined by President Bush's State of the Union

Addresses can go a long way towards empowering the people of Iran to affect change in their country.

The following are some funding options for review and consideration by the U.S. DoD:

- Short-term Funding:
 - Produce and disseminate a civil disobedience training video via satellite into Iran. This Farsi language video with young men and women as instructors would highlight the role of civil disobedience in toppling dictatorships. The video would then be distributed throughout Iran.
 - Hold a major conference on Iran at Georgetown University. Very senior U.S. Government officials and leading Iranian opposition figures would attend this conference. The conference would be broadcast live into Iran with the purpose of demonstrating to those inside Iran that the disparate opposition is united in its demand for a regime change. Images of a united opposition at a conference with senior officials from the Bush Administration broadcast live into Iran (and carried by all U.S. and non-U.S. outlets) would be a major boost to the morale of those inside Iran willing to confront the security forces of the regime. It would also send a very powerful message to members of the ruling clergy that their days may be numbered.
 - Produce and disseminate educational videos in Farsi on democracy in America to the Farsi-speaking media for broadcast into Iran. A major component of this project would be to highlight the positive role that American women of Iranian descent are playing in the life of our country. At this juncture in Iran's history, it is very important to highlight the failures of the regime and to contrast this with the realities of life in America through the lens of the American-Iranian community.
 - Investigate, compile, and disseminate the human rights abuses of the regime through visits by the victims of these

human rights violations to Western capitals. In addition to the fundamental differences with the Islamic regime on such issues as weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorism, it is important that the issue of human rights be a major focus of American demands for the Iranian people.

- Invite senior and junior Shia clergy from Tehran, Qoma, and Mashad to the United States for meetings with their Jewish, Christian, and Muslim counterparts.
- Sponsor a trip for 30 Iranian journalists to take a tour called "Get to Know America and Americans." Let them then go back to Iran asking this fundamental question: "Why do Americans of Iranian descent living in the United States enjoy a higher standard of living than Iranians in Iran?"
- Invite leaders of the student movement to testify on Capitol Hill about their ordeal and how they envision a future Iran. Giving these young men and women a platform would provide enormous moral support to the entire movement inside the country.
- Invite prominent Iranian women to meet with female members of Congress, successful entrepreneurs, journalists, and nonprofit organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).
- Immediately fund satellite TV stations based in Los Angeles that are viewed by millions inside Iran. Integration of these stations into a National Iranian Radio and Television Network would provide an excellent platform for U.S. officials to enunciate their vision for U.S.-Iranian relations and for Iranian dissidents to share their vision of a future Iran with their compatriots.

- Long-term Funding:
 - Fund for 1 year the operating expenses of a U.S.-based nonprofit foundation established to support democratic principles, secularism, human rights, and a free market economy in Iran. This 1-year funding would cover personnel and major stand-alone projects. All the projects outlined above could be rolled into the activities of this U.S.-based nonprofit foundation.
 - Provide funding to produce a comprehensive blueprint for a post-theocratic Iran. This blueprint would cover the future shape of Iran's polity in the following areas: constitution, foreign and national security, energy, agriculture, health care, finance, commerce, role of religion in society, and economics. The blueprint would be disseminated into Iran through an aggressive media campaign to demonstrate to the Iranian people, "A Vision Of The Future Beyond An Islamic Republic."

These major initiatives could be launched at a Rose Garden event where President Bush announces via satellite to the Iranian people (carried by Radio Farda, Voice of America, British Broadcasting Corporation, Radio Israel, etc.) his firm commitment and dedication to empowering the Iranian people to change their form of government. Prominent members of the President's own American-Iranian staff, prominent and not-so-prominent members of the American-Iranian community, and members of the Iran National Coalition would be present at this event. This historic occasion would mark the beginning of the end for the Islamic Republic of Iran and embolden the Iranian people to rise.

Iranian Dissidents and a National Coalition.

One of the only prominent Iranian opposition figures outside Iran publicly calling for an end to Iran's pursuit of a nuclear bomb is Reza Pahlavi. In both his public and private speeches he has staked out a position in line with U.S. concerns about regional instability as a

result of nuclear proliferation. In addition, and according to various press reports, his message of civil disobedience, nonviolence, and national referendum are gaining momentum inside Iran, albeit at a slow pace.

The rationale for supporting Reza Pahlavi and other dissidents outside Iran (like Dr. Azar Nafisi, Dr. Manouchehr Gandji, Mehmat Ali Chehregani, Sepehr Zanganeh, Ladan Boroumand, Mehmagiz Kar, Parviz Sayyad, Abbas Goli Bakhtiar, Esmail Khoei, and Hamid Ladjvardi) is that there is a limit to how far one can criticize the regime while inside Iran. It is only from the outside that one can seriously question and challenge the regime. It is therefore imperative that the United States encourage and support the activities of these dissidents as symbols of opposition to the Islamic Regime. However, the United States must not impose a solution that includes dissidents like Reza Pahlavi. Rather, the United States must encourage the formation of an Iranian National Coalition with Reza Pahlavi and other dissidents as members of the coalition.

Critics of this approach will argue that this is a repeat of America's 1953 debacle in Iran. This argument is far from accurate. The United States would merely be leveling the playing field for Reza Pahlavi and members of the Iranian National Coalition to put forward their ideas as to how Iran's future should be shaped. The Iranian people would make the final decision in a free, fair, and transparent referendum.

In order to ensure the success of Iranian dissidents and the Iranian National Coalition, the following steps need to be taken:

1. Provide logistical support for the direct broadcast of dissidents' messages into Iran.

2. Give more airtime to members of the Iranian National Coalition on the VOA, Radio Farda, and other U.S.-based and non-U.S.-based outlets.

3. Identify "safe houses" in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East for members of the regime who wish to meet with Reza Pahlavi and members of the coalition.

4. Invite Reza Pahlavi and members of the coalition to Capitol Hill to testify and share visions for Iran with the U.S. Congress.

5. Ask America's allies in the Persian Gulf to fully fund the activities of Reza Pahlavi and the Iranian National Coalition for a 2-year period.

Iran Coordinator.

The activities outlined above can be supervised under the Office of Iran Coordinator. President Bush should appoint an Iran Coordinator in order to ensure an outcome favorable to U.S. interests in the post-theocratic Iran. The people of Iran are now looking beyond the Islamic regime, and President Bush's recent statements since September 11 have emboldened them and inspired the more courageous to publicly challenge that regime. An Iran Coordinator is needed to ensure that President Bush's intentions are communicated to Iranians in an honest and unadulterated fashion. The Iran Coordinator would also engage the people of Iran in a clear and open dialogue about their future.

Further, the role of an Iran Coordinator would include providing the administration with timely, pro-active policy initiatives designed to ensure that the government of Iran does not sabotage U.S. efforts in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. The campaign to liberate Iraq from Saddam Hussein dovetails with Washington's goal of exporting democracy to Iran. Any U.S. policy toward Iraq and Iran must be mutually reinforcing in order to achieve maximum benefits for U.S. national security interests. Therefore, it would be important that the Iran Coordinator explain America's Iraq policy to the Iranian people via the VOA, BBC, Radio Israel, Radio Free Iran and other satellite stations based in Los Angeles.

Appointment of an Iran Coordinator would be one of the most significant demonstrations of America's resolve to establish relations with the democratic and free Iran of the future. It would demonstrate that the United States is serious when it says that it will support the people of Iran in their quest for freedom and democracy. Indeed, the Islamic regime could well begin to unravel immediately after this appointment was announced because of the psychological effect on

the mind-set of all Iranians.

A fundamental feature of Iranian political culture has been the "Green Light Syndrome." In other words, the West in general, and Washington in particular, decide the course of events in countries like Iran. Therefore, if and when the time comes for one regime to go or for a person to be supported, the United States will give the Green Light, and it will happen. The majority of Iranians already view President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech and his recent strong statement in support of the people as a sign that Washington is ready to give that "green light." The appointment of an Iran coordinator would be further "evidence" that the United States has given the "green light" that the regime must go.

The Coordinator would report to the National Security Advisor and attend all policy sessions on Iran. The purpose of the Iran Coordinator would be to ensure that any regime change in Iran is favorable to U.S. interests. The primary responsibility of the Iran Coordinator would be to disseminate the administration's policy into Iran and to advise the administration of the Iranian response. To this end, the Coordinator would vet opposition groups to ensure that they share Washington's national security interests and are genuine democrats. Finally, maximum impact would be achieved if the Iran Coordinator were fluent in Farsi and Azeri, understood Iranian political culture, and was an American of Iranian descent.

Islamic Bomb versus Iranian Bomb.

A fundamental dynamic at play in Iran today is a renewed sense of national pride at being Iranian. Islam, both as a religion and form of governance, has taken a backseat to nationalism. The historic struggle between traditionalism and modernity that has been the mainstay of Iranian history is now swinging away from traditionalism. Indeed, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 was, in many ways, a counter-revolution. After years of taking a backseat to modernity, the forces of traditionalism had finally triumphed. In many respects, Mohammad Khatami's first victory in 1997, owed as much to his use of nationalist themes and the inclusion of pride at being Iranian as well as a Muslim nation.

Viewed in this context, any announcement by the Islamic Republic of Iran that Iran successfully detonated a nuclear bomb would be welcomed by an overwhelming majority of the people. This euphoria would be temporary but nonetheless widespread because it would appeal to the Iranian sense of nationalism. Should the regime make an announcement that the “nation has acquired an Iranian bomb” then it would be welcome and legitimize the regime. However, should the regime portray this event as an Islamic bomb at the service of the Muslim world, then the entire context of what this means to the nation would change. An “Islamic bomb” would be viewed by the Iranians as a tool in the hands of the clergy to intimidate and blackmail its neighbors. An Iranian bomb would be viewed as a legitimate means to defend the nation against any real or perceived enemy. It would be justified as: “Well, if the Pakistanis have it, why not us. If the Israelis have it, why not us. If the Americans have it, why not us.”

The Clerics and a Nuclear Bomb.

The 14 grand ayatollahs living in Iran would most likely support and give their blessing to the continuation of Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear bomb so long as it was put into the service of Islam; a defense of Muslims and not used for offensive purposes. Of the 5,000 recognized ayatollahs in Iran, some might disagree with resources being diverted to pursuing a nuclear option, but a majority would be supportive. Those clerics opposed to the regime such as Grand Ayatollah Montazeri would not welcome the news of a bomb in the hands of the regime, but he would be supportive of the fact that the “Muslim nation of Iran has acquired this capability.”

Junior clerics who have been vocal in their opposition to the concept of velayate-faqih, such as Mohsen Kadivar and Abdollah Nouri, would in all likelihood support continuation of Iran’s quest for a nuclear bomb. They would, however, lend their support so long as the program was transparent, in order to ease the country out of its current international isolation. They would, for example, favor open access to all facilities.

Nonclerics and a Nuclear Bomb.

The relatives of the powerful such as Mohammad-Reza Khatami; Jamileh Kadivar, the wife of Ataollah Mohajerani, Khatami's former Minister of Islamic Guidance; Ali-Reza Nouri, the younger brother of Abdollah Nouri; and Hadi Khamenei, the estranged brother of the Supreme Leader, would also welcome Iran's quest for a nuclear bomb. This group, would, however, view this weapon in the broader context of Iranian deterrence capabilities and not within the Islamic context.

Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, the former mayor of Tehran, may play a prominent role in the future of Iran and, as such, his position on the issue of Iran's quest for a nuclear bomb would be instructive. As Tehran's no-nonsense mayor, Karbaschi turned Tehran into a city "that works." His tenure as mayor and popularity during this period, coupled with his still close ties to former President Rafsanjani, suggests that he would pursue the nuclear option. He would see this as a political platform for his own advancement, albeit using the bomb itself in the context of defending Iran.

Any members of the regime's revolutionary security forces that emerged to take charge in a coup or regime change scenario would most likely continue the quest for a nuclear bomb. They most likely would see this as a positive platform and a nationalist agenda that would play well with the majority of Iranians. Furthermore, as a "military person" the issue would be put into the context of Iran's need to deter its "regional enemies" or stay at a parity with its neighbors, Pakistan and India.

Conclusion.

The United States has a historic opportunity to put the genie of Islamic fundamentalism back into the bottle by empowering the Iranian people to change their regime. If Washington is serious about ending Islamic Iran's nuclear ambitions; if Washington is serious about ending Islamic Iran's support for global terrorism; if Washington is serious about promoting democratic pluralism in the Middle East; then a robust proactive policy of regime change is the only option to consider. In the end, America must remain true to the

core values that have made our country a beacon of hope for millions around the world: freedom, rule-of-law, and economic opportunity. It is time we made it very clear to the Iranian people that we support their quest for freedom and will act upon this quest, and that we will not engage their tormentors in any way shape or form. Empowering the people of Iran to change their regime is in America's national security interests; but it is also a long-standing tradition of our moral fabric as a nation. The words of another President are instructive in this regard:

Whenever the standard of freedom has been and shall be unfurled,
there will be America's heart, her benediction and her prayers.

John Quincy Adams