

Iran: The Coming Collapse of the Islamic Gulag

Contributed by Miklos K. Radvanyi
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In present day Iran the impression is that, in spite of the most recent popular uprising against a thirty-year old theocratic tyranny, power remains firmly in the hands of Khomeini's turbaned successors. Indeed, on the surface, the Iranian regime appears powerful and even dynamic both at home and abroad. In reality, however, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as it calls itself, is a weak state. Existing beneath the surface, there is an illegitimate and authoritarian regime that maintains itself by vicious suppression of its opponents. Promising to restore Iran's historic greatness once again, the mullahs want to advance the people into the future by recreating the 7th century societies of Mecca and Medina. Adding insult to injury, the religious-political establishment essentially defines nationalism negatively by its irrational hatred toward the United States and Israel, and not positively by the accomplishments of a five thousand year old civilization.

The intensity of this hatred has become the ultimate proof of official patriotism: the more extreme the expression of hatred the better patriot is an Iranian in the eyes of the mullahs. In short, in Iran hatred controls politics often even against the best interests of the regime. For these reasons, Iran is neither Islamic nor a Republic. The essence of Islam is not negation and anarchy and republics do not attempt to be exclusive.

Moreover, the Iranian people are burdened with one of the weakest and most isolated economies in the world. Currently, Iran's economy is ranked close to the bottom in a survey of the world economies. Among the seventeen countries of the Middle East and North Africa, Iran ranks sixteenth. The unemployment rate among young people below the age of thirty that comprise 70% of the population is 30%. Inflation hovers between 30% and 40%, depending on the data provided by various sources. Per-capita income is below \$1,500, near that of the Gaza Strip. In spite of Khomeini's, the currently reigning mullah's and Ahmadinejad's promises of an "Islamic classless society", 20% of the population control 80% of Iran's wealth. According to official Iranian estimates, capital flight to safe havens, such as Dubai, Zurich, Doha, London and the Caribbean islands, amounts to an annual sum of at least \$5 billion. In short, the ruling theocracy had turned Iran into an impoverished, destitute, corrupt, and hopelessly backward country.

The great lesson of the United States' thirty-year confrontation with the Iranian theocracy is, how little four successive administrations understood and were able to control events within and outside Iran. This continuous failure had bred confusion in Washington and the potential of a regional catastrophe in the greater Middle East. Now, for President Obama the moment of truth has arrived. Time is of essence. The crisis is real. Ayatollah Khamenei's demonstrated unwillingness to "unclench" Iran's "fist" calls into question the wisdom of the President's moralistic diplomacy. Equally misguided is President Obama's dogged insistence on treating all Muslim peoples and countries, including Iran, as monolithic. In his interview with al-Arabiya and later in his Cairo speech, the President invoked the term "Muslim world"; numerous times without explaining the contradictions between his wishful view and the protracted disunity among the countries comprising this fabled entity.

Even more worrisome is President Obama's relativist worldview. Historically, while the West separated God from politics, established a political order based on reason, and imbued society with the idea of tolerance, Islam in general, and since 1979 Iran in particular, moved from the deconstruction of historical, religious and political ideas to their fraudulent reconstruction. Because of this incomprehensible intellectual fraud, radical religious interpretations of Islam were able to turn thriving civilizations into their own negations. The Ayatollah Khomeini's Shiite version of "permanent world revolution" and the new totalitarianism of the terrorist organizations of Hetzbollah and Hamas coalesced into a Shiite-Sunni alliance through which the theological and secular notions of unlimited powers must be realized. The resulting terror unleashed upon a defenseless Lebanon made this strategically important country into a fulcrum of an unstable region. Concomitantly, Hamas' belligerence against Israel and Fatah has brought untold sufferings upon the Palestinian people in the West Bank as well as the Gaza Strip.

Presently, an undeclared war is brewing between Iran and the rest of the world that could blow up the Middle East and Europe. Less radical elements within Iran appear to have been sidelined by the extremists keen to preserve and expand internal terror and external aggression. Threatening statements and declarations of murderous intent are becoming increasingly bolder and uglier. The main worry for the United States is Iran's nuclear ambitions and its support of terrorism throughout the world. Yet, the Iranian theocracy is in trouble. In the aftermath of the fraudulent elections, cracks opened in the regime's leadership. The so-called Supreme Leader, Grand Ayatollah Khamenei, is struggling to reassert his supremacy by taking the hardest line against reforms and opening to the world. But the risk for the United States, Israel, the Middle East, and the rest of the world is no smaller: being dragged again into a debilitating, paralyzing and open-ended confrontation with an irrational and suicidal regime.

In this situation, American foreign policy cannot remain static. President Obama's predicament is that the Iranian challenge will not stand still while he and his advisors overcome their foreign policy incompetence. The urgency of the Iran threat calls for a careful coordination of domestic and foreign policies. Instead of pursuing a highly divisive and financially ruinous domestic agenda that causes disunity of purpose in the United States, the President should vindicate democracy and free market capitalism by defending both throughout the world. Failure to do so would result in loss of confidence in and respect for his judgment and ability to lead. The security of the United States and the stability of the Middle East and Europe should take precedent over President Obama's personal quest for universal adulation.

Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated that military victories are the most effective weapons against Islamic extremists. Therefore, when diplomacy and all the sanctions fail to stop Iran's nuclear ambitions and its belligerent foreign policy, the United States and its allies in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Australia must not shirk from using appropriate force to eliminate Iran's obsolete theocracy.