

Supreme Leader Khamenei's Responsibility for Iran's Present Situation

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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In the late 1970s, as an undergraduate at Sharif University of Technology in Iran



Brief Analysis

Mohsen Sazegara, recently a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute and now at Yale University, posted on several Persian-language websites (including gooya.com) a long open letter to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Hossein Khamenei. Below are translated extracts from that letter.

Dear Mr. Khamenei:

Let go of these strange thoughts of yours that the whole world is run by an invisible executive board and that this board -- in your words, "the enemy" -- works day and night and lives to see what you do in Iran and then conspires and plots against you, the Islamic Republic, or religious rule. . . . All the people and governments of the world are busy with their own lives and work. Iran occupies a very small part of their time.

Working in the direction of amity with the world and looking after the Iranian nation's interests, peace, and reconciliation will help this suffering nation to have a moment of tranquility and repose and finally step out of "the current sensitive situation" after twenty-seven years. But making friends with the world has some prerequisites, such as democracy and human rights. . . .

The regime technocrats, mostly from the first generation and the time of the Islamic Revolution, have undergone an intellectual revolution in the course of the last twenty-seven years. Because the slogan of returning to the policies and values of the Revolution -- especially when it is meant to deceive the people -- is, in actuality, inconsistent with this group's education and experiences, they have experienced confrontation with the blow in power. This has resulted in the resignation and dismissal of many of the technocrats. President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad's ministers will divide into two groups. The wiser group will work along with the technocrats in government organizations and will then become entangled in a confrontation with groups such as the Ansar-e Hizballah and those in the Kayhan newspaper. These latter groups speak of cleansing and of the presence of seditious elements in the government. They thus insist on continuing with hardline policies that have already failed, and they experience problems with the government's executive branch and the regime's technocrats, thereby exacerbating the impotence of the government. Take a look at President Ahmadinezhad's prime minister, who, due to his rashness in these matters, was dismissed from the Foreign Ministry during the administration of former foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati, and who wishes to pursue the same matters in the same way, but now on a national level. . . .

You and your leadership headquarters are the next center of conflict. When an armed group enters the political arena, there is no reason for it to obey you or anyone else. As such, in the recent presidential elections, you and those active in your headquarters supported one candidate but set him aside at the last moment. In the matter of the ministers, from the beginning, they have not put some of your recommendations into practice. This group has followed its own way, especially in the case of the Foreign Ministry. You can be certain that the more you insist on your ideal -- which is interference in executive matters -- the more you will be set aside. The genie that you have unleashed from the bottle has gripped your throat before any one else's. You have no choice but to discharge some of the military and security commanders supporting President Ahmadinezhad and take away their military power. You have already started doing this, though it has no effect, because you have already interlaced the forces supporting yourself with them. . . .

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard is another locus for quarrels. You know better than I do that the guard is not an organization for complete obedience and that, since the first day, it was established with butts and whys. Despite repeated cleansings, its ruling band of coup d'etat supporters does not enjoy any popularity in the ranks of the guard. Their main problem is with the ranks of the guard and with a large section of its command. When the guard gains more political and economic power, these problems will be exacerbated. . . .

The issue of poverty will not be solved until Iranians are satisfied and invest, produce, and increase the gross domestic product (GDP). That is, poverty will not be solved until the country begins to move. Returning Iranian per capita income to the 1977-1978 level of \$4,000 will require a GDP of about \$300 billion, which is more than two-and-a-half times the current GDP. Oil income will, at most, total \$40 or \$50 billion, which is 15 percent of the GDP needed for attaining prerevolutionary per capita income. The rest must be produced by the country's industrial, agricultural, and services sectors -- in other words, by the Iranian nation. In order to do this, Iranians must see a safe and calm environment, suitable laws, and wise statesmen, so that they can happily invest and produce in the industrial, agricultural, and services sectors. Take a look at the depression in the Tehran Stock Market, at real-estate transactions, or at the terrifying rate of hard-currency flight from the country, to see how the Iran's economy and the people react. Believe me, this is not a conspiracy of that world enemy. It is the self-evident truth of economic science. . . .

There must be clear and specific laws and a strong judiciary, and prince and pauper must be equal before them so that any discussion of eradicating prejudice can be meaningful. Extralegal institutions with you yourself at their helm are the most important sources of lawlessness. Take a look at the last few years and see how the institutions related to you have escaped all punishment. Take one look at the Kayhan newspaper and the fate of all its defamations and accusations and see that there is no one to defend the defamed and the accused. They do what they wish with whomsoever they want and there is no referee or proper authority to investigate or handle these matters.

Consider the fate of the attackers of the university students' dormitories or the instigators of the chain of murders or the torturers of the mayors and deputy mayors of certain areas and dozens of other such cases. In the nineteenth century, a very interesting thing happened. When Nasir ud-din Shah returned from his third trip abroad, he gathered all the courtiers and told them that what he saw there was the rule of law. For one hour he talked of the law and its necessity for the country. One of the courtiers said later that in that gathering no one dared say, "Your majesty, you are the main reason for the absence of the rule of law here." Now this is your story. . . .

It is said that he who makes his bed must then lie in it. You made this country into what it has become, and it is you who must answer for that. It is clear what those like myself should do. I seek to change the current national constitution. I seek to codify a democratic constitution based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I consider the starting point for this to be a free referendum -- carried out under the observation of international organizations -- to determine the fate of the current constitution. In order to achieve this purpose, we have no choice

other than to organize civic resistance against those in authority who oppose the people's wishes. . . .

I know that in your heart, you are laughing at what I am saying. You are, unfortunately, drunk with power. You think that you are riding the crest of the wave of fortune and that you have eliminated your opponents. You are mistaken. The inevitable result of continuing down the current path is clear. It has happened many times in the history of Iran and of the world. It is not too late for you to work together with the people in order to cease from inflicting more damage on the country. You know yourself.

My success is from God alone.

Mohammad Mohsen Sazegara Washington, DC September 2005

Mohsen Sazegara, a research affiliate at Yale University, is a former visiting fellow at The Washington Institute.

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