

Iran's Acts of Hostility Earned It 'Evil' Label

Feb 8, 2002



Articles & Testimony

President Bush's inclusion of Iran with Iraq and North Korea in the "axis of evil" prompted several commentators and academicians to express surprise, but they shouldn't have. Mr. Bush merely called a spade a spade.

Some like to call Iran a democracy. It is not. President Mohammad Khatami may have been elected in 1997 from a field of four candidates, but only after 234 others were disqualified for being too liberal or too secular. In other words, the Iranian leadership believes that if the people have true choice, they will choose wrong. Many of the real reformists are now in prison. That's how Iranian democracy works.

But is Iran a threat to U.S. security? Yes.

For years, the Islamic republic, a country awash in oil, has worked to build a nuclear reactor in Bushehr and has spared no effort to acquire nuclear weapons. Can Iran be trusted with nuclear weapons?

At a Dec. 14 sermon in Tehran, former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, whom the State Department once regarded as a reformer, suggested dropping a nuclear bomb on Israel. If that's moderate, imagine the hard-liners.

Iran's ambitions aren't limited to medium-range missiles, though. Last February, CIA Director George J. Tenet told Congress that Iran was actively working on intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of striking New York or Washington.

According to the most recent State Department report on global terrorism, Iran remains "the most active state sponsor of terrorism." Mr. Khatami says Iran does not support terror, but Iran still hosts terrorists such as Imad Mughniyeh, mastermind of two decades of car bombs and hijackings that have killed hundreds of Americans.

Mr. Khatami refused repeated requests to allow investigators to question Ahmed Sharifi, an Iranian Revolutionary Guard brigadier general who allegedly masterminded the bombing of the U.S. military barracks in Saudi Arabia. Last month, more than four years into Mr. Khatami's reign, Iran was caught red-handed shipping 50 tons of sophisticated weaponry to Palestinian terrorist groups.

Many journalists, academics and commentators cling to the increasingly tenuous illusion that there is a difference between the moderate Mr. Khatami and hard-liners like Mr. Rafsanjani, and so the United States should engage with the moderates.

It's interesting, though, especially after Sept. 11, to examine the track record of these experts. Shortly after Mr. Rafsanjani's election as president in 1989, the State Department labeled him a moderate. Former President Bush went further and said Mr. Rafsanjani "offers hope." Upon Mr. Rafsanjani's inauguration in August 1989, The Washington Post declared, "Rafsanjani's ascendance to a new and more powerful presidency indicated that more moderate forces were consolidating their control." Academics were likewise dewy-eyed in their euphoria.

Iran has a rich culture and traditions that are thousands of years old. The regime imposed upon Iran by force of guns and dictatorial ayatollahs does not represent the vast majority of the people. Iranians deserve better.

Not only are Iranians overwhelmingly pro-Western, but they are also pro-American. This is not an accident. When I lived in Iran, people saw Europe's engagement with Iran as little more than an excuse to make a quick buck in business deals with the mullahs. Since hard-liners control the oil and the import-export trade, engagement only pumps money into the hardliners' wallets at the expense of the reformers.

The Iranian government deserves to be part of the "evil axis." But it needn't be for long, for Iran is fraying at its seams.

Supporting Mr. Khatami means bolstering an unpopular regime. Freeing Iran does not mean using military force. It means standing back while it collapses from within.

There should be no olive branch for dictators. ❖

Baltimore Sun

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆
Farzin Nadimi

(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](#)

TOPICS

[U.S. Policy \(/policy-analysis/us-policy\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Iran \(/policy-analysis/iran\)](#)