

U.S. and Regime Change in Iran

Nov 20, 2001



Articles & Testimony

Kabul has fallen and the Taliban has collapsed. The Bush administration has demonstrated that it has the might and political willpower to pursue the war against terrorists and their sponsors.

Well, some of them. According to the most recent State Department "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report, Iran is "the most active state sponsor of terrorism." And yet in October, six US senators feted Iran's UN ambassador at the Capitol, and Secretary of State Colin Powell and Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi talked in the corridors of the UN.

Finding a partner in the Islamic republic is about as constructive as finding "moderate Taliban." Last month saw the worst rioting in Teheran since the Islamic revolution. More than 100,000 young people -- the core of President Muhammad Khatami's constituency -- took to the streets chanting not "Death to America" but "Death to Khatami." They are disillusioned with their president's unfulfilled promises and his refusal to intercede when vigilantes attack students, close newspapers, or haul 30 reformist lawmakers off to court (as occurred last week). To engage Iran now would be to repeat the mistakes of 1953 and 1979, when the US supported an increasingly dictatorial and unpopular Iranian regime.

The Iranian government is out-of-touch with the Iranian public. Few Iranians care about the Arab-Israeli conflict. Despite the preaching of their leaders, most Iranians are much more concerned with Iraq than Israel. Iranians see a common enemy in the Sunni fundamentalism of groups like the Taliban and in the ethnic chauvinism of Iraq. After all, Saddam Hussein started a war that killed a half million Iranians -- all in the name of pan-Arab nationalism.

While Iranians struggle to feed their children, the Islamic republic pours hundreds of millions of dollars into its nuclear program. Iran already possesses missiles capable of striking Israel, yet the Islamic regime now seeks to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles. Iranians complain that they need new schools and factories, yet the Islamic republic continues to fund and arm Hizbullah through its regular Iran Air cargo flights to Damascus. It is no wonder the ayatollahs are increasingly out of touch with ordinary Iranians.

Rather than engage Iran, the US should isolate the Islamic republic. The same man Powell shook hands with represents a regime which hosts Imad Mughniyeh, a founder of Hizbullah and the man responsible for the 1983 attacks on the US embassy and marine barracks in Lebanon, as well as attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets in Argentina in 1992 and 1994.

Crowds in Kabul cheered as the Taliban fled, and millions will cheer if the ayatollahs fall in Iran. Iran remains the real key to lasting stability in the Middle East. Iranians are overwhelmingly pro-Western and secular.

When I lived in Iran, one participant in the 1979 revolution explained to me, "We had a revolution because [Ayatollah Ruhollah] Khomeini promised an Islamic democracy. What we got was Islamic, but no democracy. But by the time we figured that out, it was too late."

Iranians overwhelmingly recognize that there is no future in political Islam. They look to a secular future where mosque and state are separate. Importantly, a growing silent majority of clerics feels the same way, for they see

political power as corrupting.

Eliminating the Taliban (and hopefully Saddam Hussein as well) will be fine in the short term. But, the US can no longer afford to have no long-term strategy in the Middle East; the terror of September 11 showed the danger of allowing policy vacuums to develop.

Instead of feting Iranian diplomats, Washington should increase its isolation of Iran. The mullahs see their world crumbling -- Washington should provide no misguided hope. When the Islamic republic falls, a new, secular Iran would be a natural bulwark against threats from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. It is ironic that in its drive to bring almost any Middle Eastern regime into its coalition against terror, the State Department may very well prolong a hostile regime and stymie the emergence of a new and friendly democracy. ❖

Jerusalem Post

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