ALTERNATIVE FOREIGN POLICY VIEWS AMONG THE IRANIAN POLICY ELITE

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Western policy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran has long been based on the assumption that Iran could be persuaded to change major aspects of its foreign policy, such as its support for death threats against Salman Rushdie, its murder of Iranian oppositionists in the West, its cooperation with terrorists (Lebanon, Palestinians, and various North African countries), and its sponsorship of opposition the Israel-PLO accord. In their declaratory policy, the G-7 industrial countries share a common assumption that the problem is with particular Iranian foreign policies, not the regime: "Concerned about aspects of Iran's behavior, we call upon its government to participate constructively in international efforts for peace and stability and to cease actions contrary to those objectives." That is also U.S. policy as set out in Martin Indyk's speech on the "dual containment" policy, in which he was careful to hold the hope for normal relations with Islamic Iran:

1 Tokyo G7 Summit Political Declaration, July 8, 1993.

I should emphasize that the Clinton administration is not opposed to Islamic government in Iran. Indeed, we have excellent relations with a number of Islamic governments. Rather, we are firmly opposed to these specific aspects of the Iranian regime's behavior, as well as its abuse of the human rights of the Iranian people. We do not seek a confrontation, but we will not normalize relations with Iran until and unless Iran's policies change, across the board.

There are some contrary voices, who suggest that Iranian behavior is not likely to change. Their argument is made stronger by the frequent dashing of hopes that moderates would consolidate power and change policy—a hope first held out in December 1979 when the election of Bani Sadr as president was said to foreshadow release of the American embassy hostages, and then repeated regularly with each twist and turn of Iranian politics. Talk of Iranian moderates has been unpopular among U.S. politicians since the days of the Iran-Contra affair, in which President Reagan was so badly burned (the release of some U.S. hostages being matched by the taking of new ones). Some Europeans also express in private their doubts about Iranian moderation. In a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Foreign Minister Claes of Belgium (which then held the EC Presidency) was quoted by U.S. officials as saying, "It would be a historic mistake" for Europeans to believe they could continue the search for Iranian moderates.\(^3\)

How realistic is the assumption that the Islamic Republic could be persuaded to change important aspects of its foreign policy? Surely the answer to that question depends not only upon what the West does, but also upon the factors inside Iran that shape foreign policy. The aim of this paper is to examine one of the most important such factors, namely, the attitudes

towards foreign policy.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FOREIGN POLICY

As in most countries, foreign policy is less important than domestic politics to Iranians and Iranian politicians. For example, the headline in the January 25, 1994 Keyhan (the country's leading paper) read "Joint Government, Majlis Meeting to Examine Country's Most Important Issues"—and foreign policy was not mentioned at all among the many issues. Whether ideologues or pragmatists, members of the Iranian elite have a whole host of domestic matters to occupy their time and attention. Foreign policy is subordinate to these pressing domestic issues—subordinate in the dual sense that foreign policy comes second and also that foreign policy is seen through the lens of how it affects domestic policy.

The Iranian political classes have lots of domestic problems on their mind these days. Let me cite just two among the many domestic issues which preoccupy them but which have received relatively little coverage in the Western media. First is the supreme religious leadership. The generation of pre-revolution Grand Ayatollahs has largely passed from the scene, with the 1992 death of the widely respected Khoei of Iraq and the 1993 death of the Iranian Golyepagani. The problem for the Islamic Republic is that its principal political-religious figures are not among those who can claim to have earned the title of Grand Ayatollah since the revolution. The country's officially designated political religious guide, Khamenei, desperately sought acceptance as Khoei's successor in the role of "source of imitation" (supreme living religious guide), but his claim was met with resistance if not ridicule. Nor are the prayer leaders in the main cities or other religious leaders closely identified with the

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regime regarded as plausible "sources of imitation." This is more than a source of embarrassment, it is a serious political problem. The regime is not seen by the people or by the religious establishment as being the embodiment of religious values, which challenges its entire self-conception. Plus there is the practical problem that no prominent leader appears to be interested in the job now held by Khamenei. Were he to die, the job would have to be filled by some second-ranker, which would further undermine the regime's claims to religious privilege.

A second domestic issue that absorbs the political leadership is the self-perceived unpopularity of the present system. During the first decade after the 1979 revolution, Islamic Iran's leaders took great pride in the hundreds of thousands of people who would regularly turn out to demonstrate their commitment to the revolution's value. The leaders now feel that the population is not necessarily on their side. Listen to the leaders' words: Khamenei, speaking on "Revolutionary Guards Day" to a group of Guards, said:

Don't think that the Islamic Republic is going to be destroyed by the utterances of a few simple-minded wishful thinkers who say it is going to end today or tomorrow. . . . [But] Iran is alone in the world today . . . . The element of loneliness in the contemporary movement has created a degree of similarity between us and the movement of Husayn Bin-Ali [who was slaughtered with all his followers in a battle he entered knowing the outcome would be certain death].

The regime has gone so far as to hold exercises with 122,000 Bassidj-force reservists in 170 cities, practicing seizing public

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5 The regime is reduced to promoting the qualifications of a heretofore obscure centenarian, Ayatollah Araki; cf. Jomhuri Islami, December 21 and 22, 1993, as printed in Akhbaar.

6 Radio Tehran, as transcribed in FBIS, January 18, 1994.
buildings and radio stations from rioters, including an exercise that closed a section of downtown Tehran while troops "recaptured" the Majlis. The outbreak of riots in several major cities in spring and summer 1992 has left the regime nervous, partly because popular demonstrations of unrest continue regularly. For instance, in a January 1994 riot, "a large number [of] troublemakers" used cranes to haul concrete blocks onto a highway in southeast Tehran.

Foreign policy is seen through the prism of domestic issues like these. So, for instance, the Islamic Republic is hypersensitive to the attitude of foreign governments to the members of the People's Mojahedeen, because Tehran is worried about popular unrest. However unreal may be there concerns—and I very much doubt that the Mojahedeen could organize unrest, much less seriously challenge the regime—Iran's leaders regard any toleration for activities of the Mojahedeen as evidence of foreign plotting against their government.

The primacy of domestic politics, and the viewing of foreign policy through the lens of domestic issues, applies also to the famous split between radicals and moderates. Despite the repeated denials by the regime's voices in the West, Iranians view politics since 1981 as characterized by a split between radicals and moderates. The differences between the two are primarily about domestic policy, as was nicely stated July 28, 1993 by Salaam, a newspaper close to the radicals:

Everybody knows that there have been two major trends of thought in our society since the revolution... One tendency believed "social justice" to be the central theme of the economy and regarded the fundamental duty of the Islamic government as support for the deprived and the barefoot....

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7 Iran Times, December 3, 1993. The exercise, during Bassidj Week, was code-named KHANDAQ.

In the foreign policy arena, it believed in full resistance to the West and the US, support for Islamic and liberation movements, and close relations with the Third World countries. To sum up, this tendency regarded itself as follower of the Imam [Khomeini]'s thoughts and was known as the "Imam's line" tendency in the society.

The other tendency emphasized giving a free hand to the private sector in the economic arena... It regarded any effort to support the deprived and the poor as an influence of Marxist and socialist beliefs. In the cultural arena, it believed in a certain dogmatism and backwardness which originated from its traditionalist approach to intellectual developments... In the foreign policy arena, it had a cautious approach toward the West and the US, etc. . . .

Since the emergence of the two tendencies, various titles were used for them: hardline and moderate, radical and conservative, left and right, etc. Both the domestic and foreign media used the various terms. . . .

It is true that many people, who believe that "the one who wins is right," have change color and have co-ordinated themselves with the "tide current." The Majlis member for one town entered the Third [1988] Majlis on behalf of one wing (the so-called left wing) and entered the Fourth [1992] Majlis on behalf of the other wing (the so-called right wing).

The radical and moderate labels each apply to tendencies, not to formal or tightly knit groups. On any issue, lines may blur, with some radicals taking a more moderate stance on that point and some moderates taking a more radical stance. To make a Western analogy, the two trends are more like Democrats and Republican in the U.S. Congress than they are like Labor and Conservatives in the British Parliament: individual egos, not party discipline, rule supreme. To continue the analogy, much as the Democrats have "old Democrats" and "new Democrats," so the moderates are split between technocrats (the smaller group, with about 100 of the 270 seats in the Majlis but with domination of the ministries) and the traditionalists (with about 130 Majlis seats). The traditionalists were well described in the New York
Times as "economically liberal but culturally hard-line conservatives" connected to the bazaar. 9

The thesis of this paper is that domestic political impulses lead a large majority of Iranian politicians to support two foreign policy stands. The first is an emphasis on economic development, which is the cement that holds together the moderate coalition of technocrats and traditionalists. The foreign policy component of this emphasis on economic development is economic ties to the West, which is seen as vital by technocrats and enjoys support from the traditionalists. The second issue is opposition to Western culture, on which the radicals and the traditionalists agree. The radicals argue that opposition to Western culture entails a foreign policy based on suspicion about the West's political agenda and support for anti-Western movements, though the traditionalists are not so sure if this foreign policy is necessary. The final section of this paper examines prospects for the future.

MODERATES, ECONOMICS, AND THE WEST

Iranian radicals have generally opposed any emphasis on economic growth or on material wellbeing. During the 1993 election campaign, leading radical Mohtashemi complained, "When you set the economy as the principle, and sacrifice everything at its altar, there would remain nothing by which you could be powerful, free, and independent. . . . We can't have Islamic and revolutionary culture by slogans and rhetoric when our economy is a Western capitalist economy." 10 Ayatollah Khamenei has shown sympathy for this point of view, though he


10 Salaam, May 17, 1993, as printed in Akhbaar.
has not been active on the issue. To the extent they care about economics, the radicals prefer to emphasize social justice and state control, not economic growth. The economic policies they implemented when they ran the government were Indian socialism, with "economic self-sufficiency, a disdain for consumerism, a stress on national planning, the tightening of the state's clutches on industries, restrictions on foreign trade, maintenance of an overvalued currency, and hostility to foreign investment." 

By contrast, Iranian technocrats are very interested in economic growth—much more so than in foreign policy. For instance, President Rafsanjani's 1993 election address was 95 percent about economics; foreign policy was barely mentioned. In choosing to stake his reputation on economics, Rafsanjani has made a dangerous gamble. His problem is that income cannot match popular expectations, no matter how good are the policies. Expectations formed during the oil boom under the Shah's rule are that Iran can have a standard of living similar to that in the West, which was the goal that the Shah held out. That goal was always ambitious for this generation, and it became completely unrealistic after the oil crash of 1985. Iran's per capita earnings from oil, in real terms, are no more than one-fourth of their 1977/78 level.

Rafsanjani recently pointed out that the standard of living has 

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11 In December 1993 he issued a letter to Rafsanjani that in effect gave him carte blanche to do what he wanted on economic policy. The letter, about the Second Five-Year Plan, was issued by the Islamic Republic News Agency on December 20, 1993 (two days before Rafsanjani presented the Plan to the Majlis); printed in FBIS, December 21, 1993.


13 Tehran TV, May 29, 1993, as transcribed in FBIS-NES.
improved in the last 5 years, during which non-oil GDP grew 7.5 percent per annum. He could have added that in the previous 10 years, basic goods became more widely available, even though per capita GDP fell about 50 percent. Consider the following improvements:

- Infant mortality fell to 35 per 100,000 in 1993/94 from 45 in 1989/90 and 100 in 1976. The number of doctors to 50 per 100,000 in 1993/94 from 34 in 189/90, which had also been the level in 1976.
- The number of higher education students rose to 17 per thousand population in 1993/94 from 8.5 in 1989/90 and 4.5 in 1976/77.
- The average urban family diet improved in 1990/91 compared to the pre-revolution level of 1978/79. In kilograms per annum, consumption of red meat was 148 compared to 93 pre-revolution; of butter and shortening, 92 compared to 46; of rice, 296 compared to 190; of bread, 736 compared to 538; of sugar, 170 compared to 78.

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15 Depending upon the exact population estimates and the technical definition of GDP, the estimate reductions cited by Iranians are between 50 and 60 percent (Keyhan, February 3, 1991; Keyhan English, February 16, 1991). Central Bank data suggest that 50 percent is a minimum figure.


17 Keyhan, February 8, 1993, as printed in FBIS.
IRAN'S STRATEGIC INTENTIONS

• Electricity was found in 99 percent of households in 1991; television, 90 percent; refrigerators, 92 percent; washing machines, 34 percent; and automobiles, 14 percent—all multiples of the 1979 figures. Telephone lines rose from 22 per thousand in 1978 to 60 per thousand in 1993.

Despite the improvements in the standard of living, Iranians are profoundly pessimistic about their economic situation. The mood in Tehran about the economy is grim, fixated on the sharply declining value of the rial on the free market (from 1450 per dollar in late October to 2100 by late December). Rafsanjani's reform program is widely blamed for the current economic difficulties. In the wake of criticism from Khamenei among others, in November he had to reverse price and trade liberalization while he spent much of December fighting off proposals for postpone the Second Five-Year Plan start from March 1994 to March 1995. Meanwhile, the foreign debt problems grow worse, forcing cancellation of major, highly-profitable projects like the $1.7 billion deal to develop the South Pars gas and oil field. Plus the declining price of oil has led the Majlis Economic and Finance Committee to propose revising the forecast 1994/95 oil revenue to $9.4 billion, compared to

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18 Iran Statistical Center data printed in Hamshari, January 8, 1994, as translated in Akhbaar; the Central Bank data differ slightly.


20 Salaam, November 23 and 24, 1993, as printed in Akhbaar. The Commerce Minister's actions were also described in Hamshari, November 18, 1993, also printed in Akhbaar.

21 Resalaat, January 19, 1994, as printed in Akhbaar.
$18.0 billion in 1990/91. The radical newspaper Salaam gloated in November,

As long as the rival faction was in a majority in the Majlis, the officials and supporters of the adjustment policy blamed that faction for failure to achieve the plan targets. Now that they have lost that pretext and the right wing controls everything, they blame one another. The day they took over the government from the radicals, they said they had taken delivery of an empty treasury. Now it is an honor to have a country with more than $30 billion debts, with foreign companies refusing to sign contracts to sell goods to Iran (owing to Iran's refusal to pay its debts of the past three or four years).

It would seem that the emphasis on economic growth, the importance attributed to access to Western economies, and the gloom about economic prospects would all work to increase the West's leverage in using economics as a means to change Iranian foreign policy. But Iranian are convinced that access to Western economies does not require changing political behavior. Iranians feel that Europe and Japan will continue trade and investment irrespective of Iranian actions because of the importance of Iran as market and oil supplier. This feeling has some basis in fact. Consider how German government spokesmen Dieter Vogel explained why the Iranian Intelligence Minister had been invited to Bonn on the eve of the trial of Iranian government agents for four murders in Berlin by referring to Iran's economic importance, "We will naturally hold the talks with Iran that are required by German interests; .. Iran is a trading partner of

22 Resalaat, January 19, 1994, as printed in Akhbaar.

23 Salaam, November 22, 1993, as printed in Akhbaar.
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significant size."24 Or consider that Iran has paid little price for its campaign of assassination of Iranians living in Europe. In a report on several murders in Germany, the German Federal Criminal Office concluded, "Behind all these crimes stands a sovereign state; . . . Iran does not shrink from committing serious crimes in pursuing its opponents. . . . The reaction in the West is most likely to be verbal" rather than any action.25

CULTURE, RADICALS, AND THE MUSLIM WORLD

Radicals place highest priority on combatting Westernism. Anti-Westernism is more than just hooligan squads enforcing proper dress by detaining or beating those women judged to be wearing "bad hejab" (visible hair, makeup, and form-fitting clothes). There is also an intellectual element, as seen in conferences like a three-day affair in January 1994.26 The radical media campaign around the issue regularly, deploring the lack of action on "protecting our Islamic-Iranian character and identity from the cultural conspiracy of those who fear and dislike our revolution."27

The Westernism that the radicals confront has many facets. Sexual morality is a vital component: what for the West is freedom for women to participate fully in public life is to Iranian radicals a call for licentious behavior. The use of Western words


and Latin letters, from technical literature to popular advertising, is seen as undermining Persian, the language of great poets and philosophers. Television soap operas and rock concerts undermine public plays on religious themes and family outings. Western food displaces a cuisine based on complex sauces prepared in the home for large family meals; the West even replaces traditional Iranian fast food at the chelo kebab.

The radical agenda is not simply medieval obscurantism or nostalgia for small-town and rural life. Much of what is presented to Iran as Western culture is in fact decadence that many in the West also abhor. Iranian radicals reject the Madonna of MTV, not the Madonna of the New Testament. Much of the change in Iran's attitude towards the West from 1964 to 1994 reflects changes in Western society, not any wave of fundamentalism in Iran. After all, the Islamic revulsion against the West became a mass movement about a decade after Western popular culture changed profoundly in ways repulsive to many, West and East. Sex and violence are staples of television; story lines reject respect for authority and tradition; individuals are guided by what feels good rather than by moral values of good and evil. Who can be surprised if many Iranians find unattractive a society that presents Michael Jackson as one of its stars?

Iran's cultural confrontation with the West is not just a moral issue: it is also a matter of foreign policy, concerning foreign governments. Leaders across the board agree that the West deliberately uses culture to undermine Iranian society. For instance, at the ceremony changing leadership of the Keyhan Institute (the largest media firm in Iran, owned ex officio by the religious leader), the outgoing supervisor Sayed Mohammad Ashgari condemned "global arrogance's mischievous acts in order to create division among the Moslem Iranian people," asserting, "Our revolution is a cultural one based on Islam," while incoming supervisor Hossein Shariatmadari said, "Although the artillery has fallen silent, the engagement is not over. The only thing is that the field of engagement has changed. . . . [Now] the war is of
Mohammad Javad Larijani, head of the Majlis Research Center, argued that the conflict between Western and Islamic culture is not resolvable because "the Westerners are dominating the Islamic world and want to expand and maintain that domination." While moderates like Larijani sympathize with the rejection of Westernism, on the whole they place less emphasis on the crusade against Western culture than on the need to develop economically. That causes conflict, because the anti-Western crusade often clashes with economic liberalization, since the former emphasizes respect for tradition while the latter permits individuals freedom of choice, including the choice to reject tradition. To take an example that preoccupied Tehran in December 1993 and January 1994, the liberalization program has encouraged foreign investment and permitted advertising for foreign goods—specifically Coca Cola and Western-style hamburgers. Revulsion against the United States extended so far as to force closure of a restaurant imitating the McDonalds style opened by some Iranian who had long lived in Spain, and a campaign has begun against Coca Cola. Mohsen Rafiqdoost, supervisor of the Janbazan and Mostazafan Foundation, explained campaign against Coca Cola: "We shall not permit the return of Western culture even in its weak form under the cover of economic prosperity." Another example is the drive to set up government-sponsored video clubs that will rent only Iranian and select Western videos (e.g., World Wrestling Federation shows). Yet another is the fulminations against satellite dishes which are now popping up across Iran (estimates range from 50,000 to


30 Jomhuri Islami, January 18, 1994, as printed in Akhbaar.
As these examples show, many Iranians find themselves attracted to at least parts of Western culture. Sometimes the same individuals combine deep craving for parts of that culture with opposition to many of its aspects. Others generally accept Western culture. Amuzegar has a point when he argues that Westernization fits well with some Iranian attitudes.\textsuperscript{31}

In a society where material well-being—even conspicuous consumption—has had strong cultural roots not only among the well-to-do but also within the underclass, this austere and puritanical policy could attract precious few . . . Similar attempts to fit Iranian society into an Islamic mold have also proved impossible. After more than a half century of Westernization, liberation from old taboos, global contacts, and an acceptance of new values and institutions, the state has been unable to reverse the irreversible.

I have deliberately underemphasized the role of religion in the conflict over Western culture. The Islamic religion is a vital element in traditional Iranian culture, but in addition, Islam is the embodiment of the alternative to Western culture in every sphere of life. By focusing on Islam as the center of the conflict with Westernism, Iranians can see the conflict not as a matter of narrow national pride but as a clash of civilizations, each of which claims to be universal. Furthermore, emphasizing Islam allows Iranians to represent themselves as the center of human civilization through the claim that they uphold true Islam—a claim that marries Shiite prejudices, Iranian pride, and revolutionary conviction. This elevation of anti-Westernism into a clash of civilizations converts a domestic policy (promotion of traditional and communitarian values) into a foreign policy issue, because the domestic legitimacy of the anti-Western campaign is greatly bolstered by the recognition on the part of others of Iran's

\textsuperscript{31} Amuzegar, \textit{Iran's Economy under the Islamic Republic}, p 301.
leadership of global Islam.

**WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS**

Iranian foreign policy will continue to be shaped by the belief that Iran has a central role in world affairs, a belief that has deep roots in Iranian culture and was a major tenet of the Shah's policies. Majlis Vice Speaker Hojatalislam Hassan Rowhani recently articulated the basic assumption of many Iranians: "Whether wanted or not, the Islamic Republic of Iran is shouldering the leadership of many communities of the world. But Iran's leadership is different from America's domineering leadership."\(^{32}\) This conception of Iran as a natural great power translates into an assumption that Iran's neighbors will certainly understand that they have to work with Iran, if not acknowledge Iranian leadership. Reporting at Friday prayers in Tehran about his trip through Central Asia, President Rafsanjani took as natural that,\(^ {33}\)

> Even those people who are not Muslims—because there are also many non-Muslims living there—they, too, understand that, because of natural circumstances, their happiness and their interest lies in cooperation with Iran, because that is the way our region has operated.

Because Iran expects to be the major power in the region, it will continue to have genuine difficulty perceiving why others in the area are touchy about Iranian assertion of what it sees as its natural rights. Iranians of many stripes are convinced that Iran has gone far to accommodate its neighbors. For example, on the Gulf islands, many Iranians think that the Shah was

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magnanimous in taking only the small islands and not Bahrain, although few would endorse Jomhuri Islami's view. "Sovereignty of Iran over Bahrain should be reestablished on the basis of historical precedents [to which end Iran] should launch an effort to terminate the separation." When Iranian leaders speak to domestic audiences, they are absolutely inflexible on Iran's rights: the moderate Rafsanjani threatened "rivers of blood" if Iran's place on Abu Musa was interfered with.

Within the general framework established by the principles that Iran is a great power and that domestic concerns matter most, foreign policy could go in a variety of directions. The uncertainty is great because of the perception that the current policy has not been successful. Radical spokesman Mohtashemi voiced a widely held view when he complained in 1993, "Foreign policy during Hahsemi-Rafsanjani's term [1989-1993] has been unsuccessful, and he has not even been able to maintain relations forged with foreign centers in the past." The complaint is that Iran has not been able to develop better relations with the West or with Arab states, while simultaneously sacrificing some of the prestige it held as the ideological pure voice of radical Islam.

Given the perception in Tehran that things are not going well and that past policy has not worked, policies could change sharply. There are mixed indications as to whether moderate policies could predominate:

- Arab politics. Early reports that Iran would not act


35 *Jomhuri Islami*, January 7, 1993, as transcribed in FBIS-NES.


against the Israel-PLO accord were mistaken; a statement to that effect attributed to an official in an Austrian News Agency report caused a firestorm in Iran. However, some suggest Iran, may confine itself to non-violent opposition. There are some signs of a cooling with the Palestinian radical Hamas organization, but Lebanese papers report Iranian aid continues, and the dispute may be about Hamas cooperation with secular leftists, which shocked Tehran. A similar evolution has taken place with the Lebanese Hezbollah, where Iran's declining support may reflect moderation or annoyance at Hezbollah's participation in democratic elections. Furthermore, it may be that Iran is concentrating more attention and resources on what appears to be the prospect of a major payoff in Algeria, as well as building a movement in the Levant's strategic prize (Egypt) rather than in the Palestinian and Lebanese side-shows. In October 1993, Osama al Baz, the head of Egyptian President Mubarak's political affairs bureau, accused Iran of training terrorists active in Egypt, renewing charges not heard much for a year.

- Accommodation with Turkey. It would seem that Iran has tempered the support it extended in 1991-2 to the PKK terrorists in Turkey. Interior Minister

38 Jomhuri Islami, September 23, 1993 and then nearly every day the subsequent two weeks (as printed in Akhbaar).

39 Iran Times, January 7, 1994 and, on $10 million said to have been pledged for 1994, Al-Shiira (Beirut), December 13, 1993, as printed in FBIS-NES, December 15, 1993.

40 Al Shira (Beirut), January 4, 1993, as printed in FBIS-NES, January 5, 1993.

41 al-Wasat (Cairo), October 22, 1993, as printed in Mideast Monitor.
Director-General for Security Gholamhossein Bolandian, after the seventh meeting of the Iran-Turkish security committee in Ankara, reported that an understanding was reached on cooperation against terror.\textsuperscript{42} Reportedly in earlier talks, Iranian Interior Minister Besharati gave Turkish Interior Minister Gazioglu a list of 138 Iranian dissidents, asking that they be expelled or their activities curtailed.\textsuperscript{43} Also, Interior Minister Turkey Mehmet Gazioglu and Iran Mohammad Ali Besharati signed in Tehran a protocol and "hostile acts along their common borders."

- Russian relations. Consider the Iranian reaction to the bitter civil war in Tadzhikistan, in which 20,000 to 50,000 people have died in the last 18 months. Iran has been "notable for its absence and impotence;" foreign aid to the rebels has come instead from Saudis and Pakistan, channelled via Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{44} This is but one example of a general trend in which Tehran ignores Moscow's anti-Muslim policies, such as its stance on Bosnia or on Kashmir, while vigorously condemning the West for positions that are in fact less distant from Iran's stance.\textsuperscript{45} In turn, Russia provides Iran with access to technology it cannot acquire elsewhere. For instance, in December

\textsuperscript{42} Abrar, December 8, 1993, as printed in Akhbaar. The survey in Mideast Monitor, December 22, 1993, of Turkish press reporting on Iranian Vice-President Hassan Habibi's visit in December 1993 was similarly upbeat.

\textsuperscript{43} Mideast Monitor, October 19, 1993.

\textsuperscript{44} Barnett Rubin, "The Fragmentation of Tajikistan," Survival, Winter 1993-94, p 86. Rubin cites a range of 20,000 to 50,000 dead; Amnesty International cites only the higher figure.

\textsuperscript{45} Iran Times, March 19, 1993.
1993, Russian ambassador to Tehran Sergei Tretyakov reassured his Iranian interviewers at length that Russia would proceed with nuclear power plants. But it seems more likely that policies will change in the direction of being more radical. That has certainly been the direction in 1993 in policy towards the United States. Consider the contrast between May and November 1993. In May, presidential candidate Rajab-Ali Taheri said on television, "direct talks with Washington to normalize relations" could help Iran, and there was no reaction to speak of from the press or the clergy. In the same month, President Rafsanjani gave an interview to *Time* (itself a controversial act in times past) in which he said that the Unites States can sometimes do good: "If [U.S. military action in Bosnia] is not done with imperialist goals, why should one not encourage a good thing?" In contrast, autumn 1993 saw a storm in response to the leaking of the 1992 letter to Khamenei, written by then representative to the U.N. Rajai Khorasani, in which he advised that Iran hold official talks with the United States. After a wave of press indignation that such a letter had even been written, Ayatollah Khamenei stated, "We don't want to have relations with the United States... Our condition [for relations] is their repenting of all the tragedies they have created in the world." The holding of

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49 By Mr. Khorasani's account, in *Abrar*, November 4, 1993, as printed in *Akhbaar*.  
50 Tehran Radio, November 3, 1993, as transcribed in *Akhbaar*. On the campaign about the Khorasani letter, see *Mideast Mirror*, November 1, 1993.
discussions with the United States was rejected as entailing a weakening of Iran's revolutionary credentials:\(^5^1\)

In the existing unequal situation in which the U.S. has all the propaganda resources, accepting talks with the U.S. means losing our revolutionary and anti-arrogance prestige. . . . If we talk about talks and with relations with the U.S., it certainly means backing off from our stands. Because there [will be] such an impression among the world's revolutionaries and Muslims.

Looking out to the more medium term, there is also the possibility that the Islamic Republic, in its current form, will fall. The degree of discontent and the perception of failure are both strong. To be sure, there is no credible challenge from any opposition force, which makes the regime look solid. It is the solidity of glass: easily fractured. There is no important social group that would come to the defense of this regime were it threatened, nor does the regime have the support of a repressive apparatus that can keep it in power against popular discontent. The "senior official" who told the Washington Post in May 1993, "There is no serious prospect of [the Islamic Republic] being overthrown," would do well to hedge his bets.\(^5^2\)

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This paper has not answered the question of whether Iranian foreign policy could fundamentally change under the Islamic Republic, but it has provided some elements towards understanding the attitudes that shape Iranian policy. The

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opposition to Western decadence, if not Western culture, is deep and strong. It takes a true optimist to think that the perceived economic advantages from ties to the West will overcome the cultural barriers, especially if Iranian leaders think that they can have those economic advantages without changing their political behavior. On the other end of the spectrum, the true pessimist could argue that opposition to the West is deeply rooted culturally while cooperation with the West is based on a tactical reading of where economic advantage lies, and that tactics could change if there appears to be greater economic gain in confronting the West by, e.g., pressuring Iran's rich neighbors to co-finance its economic development.