

## **Iran, Democracy and International Community\***

**Reza Simbar**

*This article explores the interactions between Iran's democratic process and international community. Iranian people established the Islamic Revolution in the 1970s under the leadership of Imam Khomeini. Although the Islamic Revolution has caused many changes in political and social issues in Iran, the process of reform and alteration is still going ahead. To understand the process of democratization in Iran, we need to study the nature of Iranian religious psychology. Iran's contemporary history provides the best background to analyze the current situation. This paper argues that any attempt to impose democracy by foreign players would face defeat; democratic reforms should be shaped by Iranian indigenous struggle. During the past 27 years, the Iranian society has been moving forward and has now gained great success in this regard. American involvement, especially military intervention, would be counterproductive and expensive. The international community should recognize the Iranian situation and the US needs to take lessons from its past failures in Iran and should respect the Iranian right to shape their own destiny.*

**Keywords:** *Iran, Democracy, International Community, Islamic Revolution, Iran-US Relations*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

There are three pillars of strategic thinking behind Iran's foreign policy in both the pre- and post Khatami eras, which were similar to the period before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. These included Iran's search for recognition of its undefined right and a sense of victimization linked to a feeling of insecurity over the past 100 years. Iran's belief in being different from its assortment of neighboring countries was an important aspect in trying to understand the country's foreign policy.

The international environment within which the Islamic Republic must operate today is very complex and multi-dimensional. Iranian government can not isolate itself from the conflict with the US. The Bush administration will continue to be a major challenge for Iran, especially regarding Iran's nuclear capability and its political stance relative to US interests in the region. The US has largely ruled out direct engagement with Tehran, choosing instead to threaten Tehran with action by the Security Council if the regime refused to abandon its suspect nuclear activity. The Iranians, meanwhile, have repeatedly dismissed the Security Council and insisted on their right to enrich uranium, which can be used for peaceful purposes, but it is also the first step on the path to constructing a weapon.

This paper intends to demonstrate the futility of foreign intervention in Iranian domestic political affairs for the purpose of improving upon its democratic credential by demonstrating the capability of both the Iranian state and society to change and innovate. It argues that the international community should recognize Iran's capability to change from

---

\*The first plan of this paper has been presented in 20<sup>th</sup> IPSA World Congress, 'Is Democracy Working', Fukuoka, Japan, 9-13 July 2006.

This paper was edited by Mrs. Marjan Heydarpour, a M.A. in TEFL from the Islamic Azad University-Tehran Branch who is now a faculty member of the Islamic Azad University-Rasht Branch

within and that the US should revise its foreign policy from aggressive and arrogant tactics to a policy of engagement and a face to face negotiation. In this direction, we assess the historical background of foreign intervention in Iranian internal affairs and its impacts and implications, Iran's struggle for independence and freedom, the role of religion in Iran's state and society, its security perceptions, and the nature of democracy and reform in Iran. It emphasizes that continuation of hard-line policy, such as sanction and war, against Iran would be counterproductive and keeps the whole region in a turmoil. In dealing with Iran, the US should not harbor the illusion that its action, somehow, would radically affect the situation. The US should recognize the right of Iran's people to make autonomous decisions about their future.

## 2. AHMADINEJAD, NUCLEAR IRAN AND DEMOCRACY

The election has consolidated the control of all branches of the Iranian state — legislative, executive, and judicial in conservative hands. For the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic, it also brought to the presidency a non-cleric who ran a populist-style campaign, attacking corruption and non-Islamic practices that had crept into the government since the death of Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Revolution, in 1989.<sup>1</sup> President Ahmadinejad claimed a return to the principles of the Islamic Revolution, called for radical economic reforms and social justice, and vowed to turn Iran into “an Islamic, exemplary, advanced and powerful nation.” On nuclear power issues, he disappointedly remarked Iran's relatively weak stance in its negotiations with the European Union (EU), but said as well that nuclear technology for military purposes was “against our Islamic values.” (Keyhan, 17/11/2005)

Discussion in Iran on the country's acquisition of nuclear weapons has tended to focus on Iran's right to acquire the technology needed to develop an independent nuclear energy program. US efforts to impede the flow of requisite technology have been viewed by the Iranians as an attempt to keep Iran backward and dependent. Washington's policy has been viewed as a hostile action toward an independent Iran. The principle of independence, of course, was one of the touchstones of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, and few Iranians of whatever political persuasion- nationalists, secularists, or advocates of strict religious government- would dissent from its importance.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past several decades, history, geography and natural resources have contributed to the rise of Tehran as a prominent regional power. With a population approaching 70 million, the Islamic Republic is by far the most populous country in the Persian Gulf. This has provided the country with a large pool of labor, a sizeable middle-class, and equally important, a big army. Furthermore, Iran has been blessed with tremendous natural resources. It holds 8.7 per cent of the world's confirmed oil reserves and 15 percent of the world's

---

<sup>1</sup> Ahmadinejad victory in campaign came by 62% of the vote, when Rafsanjani gained only 36%.

<sup>2</sup> Iran's struggle for nuclear technology intensifies the crisis between the US and some other Western countries with Iran. Iran offers its own reasons for accessing nuclear technology, as the West has its own perceptions and fears. The US plays a vital role in this crisis. The growing crisis may have terrible impacts on the region, the Islamic world and whole international arena. So, Iran and the Western countries, and the international community should plan a workable strategy to manage the crisis based on peaceful means and non-violent sustainable cooperation.

confirmed natural gas reserves. Finally, Iran is considered as an important gate to energy supply in the Central Asian region. As a matter of fact, it can be argued that the stability of Iran has been crucial to many countries all over the world.<sup>3</sup>

Iran is a country with a rich culture, a historical record and a stable government. These elements will respectively lead to a national identity, a social stability and a well placed political culture.<sup>4</sup> A vast land area, rich resources and strategic location impart to Iran a special standing in political calculations and a greater scope to attain a genuine position as a regional power as compared with other countries, like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (Hunter 1990).

By studying Iran's history over the last two centuries, we can see how Iranians have usually felt deeply affiliated to their national, social, ethnic and religious heritage. Iran's political and social movements in its contemporary history have been concentrated on keeping national sovereignty and independence. So, on one hand, Iran's geopolitical and geo-economic position carries it toward the great powers, but on the other hand, the Iranian orientation is to avoid their influence. Iran's contemporary history fairly demonstrates how its intellectual and religious movements had been shaped around this kind of resistance. The most challenging problem for Iranian policymakers has been to keep balance among national wealth and security, religious identity and independence, national sovereignty and political stability. Based on this, settling tensions arising from relations with the West presents the most paradoxical challenge for the Iranian government. Tehran neither would be able to manage politics in pre-revolutionary style nor can ignore the great international changes, the economic reason, and its geopolitical situation (Afrasiabi and Maleki 2003).

The Iranian struggle for independence and democratic change strikes deep roots in the collective memory of the Iranian people. Two historic opportunities to fulfill these principles have been destroyed by foreign powers. Russia and Britain divided Iran into their spheres of influence in 1907 and destroyed any chance for a constitutional government that could realize both independence and freedom. Ironically, the American state used the CIA to destroy the nationalist government of Dr. Mohammad Mossaddeq (Gasiorowski 1991).

Therefore, guarding national sovereignty has been considered a very important issue for Iranians. Based on this, the Iranian revolution could be interpreted as a struggle for restoring Iran's sovereignty. In the beginning of the Islamic revolution, Iranians viewed foreign powers as basically shaping Iran's politics. But now, Iranian people, with their national independence, want to solve their problems domestically. Since Iran has not been dominated

---

<sup>3</sup> Iran is located at the center of the world's largest pool of energy resources; it straddles prominently the global oil and natural gas checkpoints at the Strait of Hormuz. It provides the cheapest and the shortest transit route at the heart of the ancient Silk Road for the transport of energy resources from the Caspian Sea basin to the world markets through the Persian Gulf; and it is the most populated country with one of the largest industrial bases in the vast region stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean.

<sup>4</sup> Since the nineteenth century, when Iran arrived fully into world politics, to the eruption of the Islamic Revolution, Iran played either the role of a weak backward buffer state between imperial Russia and Britain or the role of a surrogate state of Britain and the United States. This historical experience helps us imagine Iran's future role in the world. The Islamic Revolution of Iran created an unprecedented opportunity for its leaders to utilize Iran's strategic significance in such a way as to enable the people to eventually control their own destiny freely and play a major role on the world stage.

by the US, Britain or other power over the last two decades, Iranians, both the state and society, want to manage Iran by themselves (Bayman et al. 2001). In the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini captured in his best known motto the principles of independence and freedom side by side with Islam (Khomeini 1981).

The constitution of the Republic also embraced these principles. A quarter of American domination was terminated (Sick 1985). For the first time in modern history, Iranian leaders achieved an unprecedented degree of control over their country's destiny at home and in world affairs. Even the brutal invasion by Saddam Hussein did not make a dent in Iran's determination to preserve its independence (Ramazani 1990).

With strong US support for the unpopular regime of Shah and its different governments including the military one who were responsible for killing thousands of Iranian people during the Islamic revolution, the US lost its credibility for many Iranians. US behavior was a sign of hostility to the popular rule in their country. After the victory of the revolution, the US was not prepared to accept its mistakes, and instead of initiating policy of accommodation and avoiding Iranian distrust, the US government behaved in a way that actually aggravated the estrangement and contributed to the ascendancy of radical forces in the revolution condition.<sup>5</sup>

Iran's post-revolutionary foreign policy has been transformed in several important ways. In the first place, the closed ties with the US turned into open hostility. Secondly, the regional alliance pattern shifted away from a pro-Israel, to an anti-status quo and pro-Palestinian policy: an important outcome of this radicalization was support for Islamic groups in the Middle-East. Thirdly, pro-US/West foreign policy changed into active participation at the UN, the non-aligned movement, the Islamic Conference and other international organizations. Finally, these trends forced Iran to explore possible links with the Soviet bloc as well as with EU countries.

Iran's new foreign policy after the Revolution, coupled with Western and in particular US diplomatic and military pressures, and the economic sanctions following the hostage crisis, all contributed toward isolating Iran regionally and internationally. Indeed, the anti-US, anti-Israel, and anti status-quo thrust of the revolutionary system, made explicit in the constitution, not only shunted Iranian foreign policy in a sharply different direction in the short term, but arguably has constrained the country's foreign policy choices ever since; relations with the US or Israel should be looked at in this context (Kemp 2004).

After the Iran-Iraq war and with the new executive power, Rafsanjani's government initiated two reform programs: to change Iran's regional and international isolation by reducing the fallout of revolutionary fever, and to change economic policies by introducing a program of economic reconstruction. In the first step in foreign policy reform, the government tried to mend fences with the Persian Gulf monarchies and re-established diplomatic ties with countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia among others. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 gave Iran an opportunity to pursue the process of

---

<sup>5</sup> Keeping national sovereignty has been considered a very important issue for Iranians. Based on this, the Iranian revolution could be interpreted as a struggle for restoring Iran's sovereignty. In the commencing of the Islamic Revolution, Iranian society viewed external players basically forming Iranian politics and its related crises. But now, Iranian people, with their national independence, want to solve their problems domestically. As Iran has not been dominated by the US, Britain or any other powers over the last two decades, Iranians, both the state and society, want to manage Iran by themselves.

normalization with the Persian Gulf states. With the invasion, Iraq replaced Iran as the immediate threat to security and integrity of these countries. The improvement in Iran-Persian Gulf relations was shown by the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) declaration in its December 1990 summit in Qatar, whereby they welcomed the prospect of future cooperation and Iranian participation in regional security arrangement.<sup>6</sup>

Today, Iranian leaders are worrisome of the American intentions of the Bush administration. They have been officially designated as “evil” by an administration and its supporters who use the phrase “regime change” as a foreign policy mantra. Iran’s leaders are aware of the US military forces in the neighborhood surrounding in Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and United Arab Emirates (UAE) and air and naval assets in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and Mediterranean Sea, as well as more in the continental United States. They believe that the United States wishes nothing more than the demise of Islamic Republic. They see the US denouncing them and conspiring with Europe and the other Western countries to deny them access to monetary credits and modern technology. Moreover, the US government owes Iran billions of dollars worth of assets confiscated by the Carter administration in the early 1980s during the hostage crises. Iran has stepped into a history of blatant American interference in its domestic politics.

The US list of grievances is equally impressive. The Bush administration, like its predecessors, regards Tehran as a serious threat to US interests in the Middle-East. Washington claims that Tehran encourages terrorism against America’s best friend in the region, Israel, openly and derisively denouncing the peace process and denying Israel’s right to exist. The US has accused Iran of hosting a gathering of the world’s most vicious anti-American and anti-Israeli revolutionary groups. To compound these problems, Iran now plays a potentially dangerous destructive role in Afghanistan and Iraq, which could lead to difficulties for occupying American forces. The US accused Iran for cheating and deceiving about its nuclear activities and is using the pressure put on it by international community to stall and punt on all nuclear issues with the purpose of continuing the program.<sup>7</sup>

Tehran has taken many steps to counter Washington’s strategy of containment. An important achievement has been the maintenance, and even consolidation of financial and economic ties with the EU. Yet, there is no doubt that the US economic sanctions against Iran have complicated Tehran’s effort toward economic development and prosperity.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> In a postwar speech, Bush offered four key challenges for the new Middle East: to create shared security arrangements, to control weapons of mass destruction, to promote a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, and to promote economic development. Iran was not invited, not consulted, and left out of the negotiations. It responded by hosting a gathering of Islamic and non-Islamic states opposed to the Madrid Conference. The Message coming from Iran during this period remained mixed. The new president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was considered more pragmatic. However, it was not until the Clinton administration came into office in 1992 that the Rafsanjani’s government attempted any new initiatives.

<sup>7</sup> The nuclear issue is by far the most complex and difficult problem for the US and Iran to resolve. Other serious problems, such as terrorism and sanctions, could be easily solved if the respective leaders decided it was in their interests. But the nuclear problem runs much deeper, and it will be difficult for Iran to meet minimum American demands now that the dispute is so public and international.

<sup>8</sup> The US is overestimating the Western kind of democratic movement in Iran. It is hard to believe that

Regarding Iran's huge oil and natural resources, one can claim that the country can survive the American sanctions. Meanwhile, the persistence of the containment strategy makes it harder for the Iranian economy to prosper. Furthermore, any hope for economic prosperity under current situation will require genuine efforts towards domestic political reform, regional co-operation and more integration in the international system.

### 3. IRAN AND DEMOCRACY

The Iranian state has succeeded in establishing a number of working democratic institutions. The competition between them is genuine. What is missing is a system of civil liberties and association, autonomous civil society, and other individual liberties.

During presidential election in 2005, the voters were presented with eight candidates with different agendas, who debated their future programs on radio and television, and this matter suggests the existence of an acceptable political liberalization. The fact is that this freedom is restrained by the principles of Iranian constitution. Still, in comparison with both the recent political history of Iran and the practices in the neighboring countries, Tehran has made many significant steps forward. Moreover, the large turnout, particularly by women, youths and intellectuals, shows a high degree of mobilization (Middle East International 3/8/2005).

Economic inequality has been an enduring feature of Iran since the day oil was discovered and its revenue began to be distributed unevenly along both class and geographical lines. Above all, it is very hard not to talk about the real effects of poverty on politics in a country where many people live in poverty. The "urban poverty" has been a persistent reality in Iran since the 1970s.

But a closer look suggests that the economy, though clearly part of the Iranian elections, has not been a decisive factor. This becomes clear if voting results are correlated with other social factors: regional income and educational level, ethnic composition of voting district, past voting patterns, religiosity, and the class composition of voters.

In the discourse of democracy in Iran, the argument of mostazafin (oppressed) and *edalat-e ejtema-i* (social justice) occupies an important position. Nobody can ignore the poor and view it as a secondary issue. Meanwhile, the argument is mixed with modernity, development and religious modernization.

How could this nation that overwhelmingly voted for reformatory candidates with promises of social and political freedom in the last eight years now turn to the complete opposite? One element overrode all others. Many of the poor and less politically educated class of people in Iran have lost faith in the promises of the reformists, who told them that only through democracy can the country experience sustainable economic growth. These people have witnessed corruption and injustice and seen that they have grown poorer every day; they have no longer patience for small steps toward democracy that may later lead to economic improvements. A relatively unknown populist figure who projects a simple life and acts like a normal person in his social expression and talks in single words understood by ordinary, frustrated, and poor Iranians, consequently, attracted millions of voters who wanted to express their frustrations via their vote and hope for real changes in their material circumstances.

---

a popular uprising against the Iranian government lies around the corner and drawing analogies from the situation that existed in the 1970s are misleading.

Drawing an analogy with the situation that existed in the 1970s is misleading. Unlike the Pahlavi period, the current regime enjoys genuine support from important sectors of the population, including some who strongly oppose its policies. They are insisting on carrying out reforms, but never asked for the collapse of the whole system. What they are looking for is some changes in Iranian system of power and mechanism in which the resources are allocated. They do not prescribe violence for achieving their goals, which basically distinguishes them from some foreign-based groups emphasizing on violent confrontation with Tehran.<sup>9</sup>

The US considers the Iranian government as undemocratic, which is unable to carry out reform and improve the situation. Given this perspective, they claim that popular discontent runs deep inside Iran and a “coming revolution” is anticipated. They see the US as a foreign force who can accelerate the pace of change in Iran. They believe that the best choice for Washington is a sustained confrontation including economic embargo and even a military attack. But the main questions arise here: how can these kind of hard-line policies lead Iran to democracy desired by the US? Would US policy of confrontation lead to any considerable change in Iran’s social and political situation? It seems that US and some other Western countries’ policies have been counterproductive. They have failed to realize their own mistakes, and the very nature of Iran’s social and political conditions. They have made a big mistake in comparing Iran with North Korea or Iraq.

The roots of this confrontation have been discussed by many academics and analysts before, but many of them have neglected the important connections between today’s affairs with past events. Many of these studies have ignored the background of Iranian perspective of the US. In a simple-minded and mechanistic analysis, they perceive a “good boy,” “bad boy” dichotomy in US/Iran relations. This normative interpretation has been misleading as they mainly neglect many other variables in the study. Many of them ignore past American records in Iran, such as its effective contribution in bringing the collapse of Dr. Mohammed Mossadeq, the leader of Iranian National Movement in the 1950s, its blind support of Pahlavi regime during Iranian revolution, its offensive behaviors regarding Iran’s revolution including planning a military coup against it, its support of Saddam Hussein during eight years of imposed war during 1980-88 and its 28 years of unilateral sanctions. This hard policy leaves no space for Iranian trust, creating a cycle of suspicion or even animosity (Simbar 2005).

#### 4. REFORM IN IRAN: MYTHS AND REALITIES

In discussing democracy in Iran, some analysts portray Iranian reformists as American supporters and they see a public unrest in the near future. Some in the American administration are convinced that the Iranian regime is too deeply entrenched to be changed by US interference (Ansari 2003).

But many indicators show that both Iranian reformists and conservatives are both defending the same principles in Iran’s foreign policy. That is, while the differences between these factions are real, it should not be exaggerated. There are different factions representing

---

<sup>9</sup> The US is overestimating the Western kind of democratic movement in Iran. It is hard to believe that a popular uprising against the Iranian government lies around the corner and drawing analogies from the situation that existed in the 1970s are misleading.

a variety of interests as analysts refer to conservative, radical, and pragmatic factions within the political spectrum. There are real disagreement and competition between them, but none would advocate a policy which might undermine the foundation of the Islamic Republic. In short, as many arguments magnify Iran's offensive behaviors, they downgrade or generally ignore all the aggressive and offensive policies taken by the US (Tekyeh 2000).

Most of the reformers who were in the Parliament have seen their efforts stymied by conservative forces. No one in the Parliament reformist camp desired to challenge the regime with violence. The bloodletting that occurred, first during the Revolution against Shah and then during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war has left Iran distinctly reluctant for more. Thus, if the US is going to have a relationship with Tehran, it must deal with Tehran. The US showed similar foreign policy behavior before; for years, the US deplored the ideology and behavior of the former Soviet Union, to the point of calling it the "evil empire." However, the US never stopped diplomatic contacts with Moscow, and, during the process, some practical and beneficial results for both sides were achieved. Therefore, engagement with Tehran is the preferred way for some members of the Bush administration. Engagement does not have to be a one-sided encounter, and, as the Europeans have demonstrated, it can be accompanied by demands for change in Iranian behavior if Iran wishes to gain practical benefits from new relationship (Tekyeh 2002).

It should be noted that after 28 years, the Iranian regime does not confront any credible threat of being overthrown by opposition groups from inside or outside the country. The Pahlavi regime was ousted from power by a broad coalition which comprised both religious and secular political forces. However, at the end of March 1979, the leader of Islamic Revolution in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, held a referendum on the question "Do you favor an Islamic Republic?" The result was an almost unanimous 'yes' and on April 1, an Islamic Republic was declared. At the moment, Tehran does not face any well-organized mass movement opposing its rule. Still, a number of groups seek the demise of the Islamic regime. These include the Mujahedin-e Khalq, which was responsible for the assassination of many revolutionary leaders in the early 1980s. In 1986, the organization moved to Iraq and closely associated with the regime in Baghdad, a development which undermined its appeal and credibility. Another opposing group is established by the monarchists who reside in the West, particularly in California and Germany. The movement is organized around the Shah's son, Reza Pahlavi. The Communist Party (Tudeh) was essentially destroyed in 1983, and the collapse of the Soviet Union discredited its ideological appeal even further. In short, the opponents of the regime of Iran lack both good organization and a strong leadership.

Furthermore, their association with foreign power has weakened such popular support they ever had back home in Iran. In conclusion, one can argue, it is highly unlikely that any of them would succeed in making a serious threat to the Islamic government in Tehran.

This leads to the second important characteristic of the political system in Tehran. Although, there are many political factions representing variety of interests, and while the differences among these factions are real, they should not be exaggerated. There are real disagreements and competition among them, but none would advocate a policy which might undermine the foundation of the Islamic regime.

Anyhow, with no doubt the Iranian government after the victory of Islamic revolution has gained a number of great achievements. The government has successfully provided the basic necessities of life to the poorest segments of Iran, including water, paved roads, and electricity. On the other hand, the public sector in Iran has failed to make enough jobs and meet the demands of the public for the basic necessities of life. Iran is the Middle-East's

second-largest producer of oil, relying on oil and gas for more than 80 percent of export earnings and its economic growth is heavily influenced by oil prices. During the past five years, higher oil prices helped an economic boom. The non-oil sector has also shown signs of growth. Iran has invested heavily in health care and education, achieving standards above the regional average (Abootalebi 2004).

In dealing with Iran, the US should not harbor the illusion that its actions, somehow, will radically affect the situation. The US should recognize the right of Iran's people to decide on their own future.<sup>10</sup> As many argue, sanctions, particularly unilateral sanctions such as those targeted at Iran, are less and less effective in a global economy, where governments have the opportunity to produce their strategic needs from other countries (Jentleson 2002). Instead, sanctions are likely to impose further hardship on the poor, while seldom affecting the original targets of the regime and government officials (Drezner 1999).

It has been argued that rather than promoting democratization and moderation, sanctions may in fact play into the hands of hardliners. So it seems that a historic move towards opening up trade and strengthening the Iranian private sector and civil society could prove more fruitful than isolationist policies of the past 28 years, which have not had any significant effect on social and political changes in Iran.

Now, the Iranian society is dynamic and energetic. If the people of Iran were able to compel the Shah's closed system to open up, they will also be able to move toward more progress and prosperity. The various layers of Iranian society, workers, farmers, teachers, students, bureaucrats, politicians, women, youth, and political activists are much more informed about world affairs and better equipped to confront the challenges in their society.

Beyond the specific effects of the embargo, policymakers should recognize that the existing Western strategy toward Iran has failed. It is neither weakening the Iranian state nor facilitating democracy; it has not curbed its nuclear weapons program nor undermined its support for Palestinians. For different but equally powerful reasons, neither the Bush administration nor the conservatives in Tehran can afford to make serious unilateral gesture to each other to break the diplomatic deadlock. To be sure, small maneuvers are possible; US aid to the catastrophe-stricken city of Bam in December 2003 is an example of such token gesture.

The US should end the embargo and replace it with recognition of its failures in Iran. The US must declare in words and show in deeds that it is not against the will of the Iranian people. A no-less-important part of such a declaration should be a commitment to respect the independence and autonomy of the movement, reiterating the US government's dedication to the idea that the future of Iran will and should be determined by the people of Iran themselves. I have discussed the interactions and confrontations between Iran and the West elsewhere (Simbar 2005).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The international environment within which the Islamic Republic must deal with today is

---

<sup>10</sup> The international community needs to recognize that the development of democratic ideals and the expansion of political and civil rights do not come about in a short time, but they need many decades and even centuries. The West itself experiences the same thing, and the same process is building up in Iran.

very complex and multi-dimensional. Iranian government cannot isolate itself from the conflict with the US. The Bush administration will continue to be a major challenge for Iran, especially regarding Iran's nuclear capability and its political stance relative to US interests in the region (Farahi and Hadian 2004). If the US is unable to agree with Europe on a common strategy, it can be reasonably assumed that there will be few other countries aside from Israel that would be prepared to take unilateral action against Iran. Moreover, when it comes to unilateral action, there is no guarantee that even the massive use of force would do anything other than delay an Iranian bomb. For this reason, the most likely outcome would be that the US would have to learn to live with an Iranian nuclear option and construct a deterrent policy that would be effective against the range of threats associated with an Iranian bomb.

The Iranian state has succeeded in turning the American hostility to its advantage. If the United State's problems in Iraq lighten, pressure on Iran may occur. What exactly would the Iranian response be is hard to predict, but Iran's possible isolationist or rejectionist policies will not resolve the situation, and America's continuous hostility would only make the problem worse.

Western interests in controlling Middle East oil, and Iranian historical suspicion of foreign powers, do not leave much room for international collaboration around democratic issues in Iran. But in the modern globalized world, much of the local politics have become global and international factors play an important role in politics at the national level.

It seems that the reforms implemented after the Islamic Revolution have provided enough evidences to conclude that the Iranian state is capable of changing and that it is innovative in its efforts to legitimate these changes. It can be emphasized that these changes have been provoked by Iranian society. Yet, this social movement has not been provoked by a single institution, a political party, or even a set of ideological currents. This process makes the Iranian social and political reform alive and energetic. This argument can be supported by the last 100 years of social and political experiences of Iranian people since the Movement of Constitutionalism.

In spite of the fact that Iranian society has experienced many rough and tumble in its way toward gaining more workable democratic political and social structure, it has made many outstanding achievements. These achievements are not comparable with many other states and societies in the Middle East and the whole of Islamic societies in the world.

Based on Iran's contemporary history, the religious Islamic movement in Iran should be recognized. No body can understand the nature of Iran's social and political transformations without a deep understanding of Islamic nature of Iranian religious ideas, and the role has been played by Iranian Shi'a leaders, such as Imam Khomeini who guided the Islamic Revolution in the 1970s. Obviously students, non-governmental organizations, women's rights activists, writers, poets, intellectual film-makers have their own role in Iran's reform movements. No one can also ignore the role played by the Iranian young religious students, clerics, and other sectors of Iranian society who believe in Islamic movement and suppose themselves as the defenders of Islam and Islamic revivalism.

As mentioned earlier, the great consensus among Iranian political groups is to keep the principles of the Islamic Revolution. Foreign influence and intervention, therefore, can not be accepted by Iranian people. In such a situation, imposed democratization by military intervention, would not be a solution. Any foreign intervention in Iranian internal affairs would be costly. Military confrontation with Iran would face defeat. The Iranian society by itself would find its way toward reform and social development.

## REFERENCES

- Abootalebi, Ali, 2003, "Civil society and Iran's quest for democracy," *Iran Analysis Quarterly* 1(1): 2-6.
- Abootalebi, Ali, 2004, "Iran's struggle for democracy continues: An Evaluation of Twenty-Five Years after the revolution," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 8(2): 4-49.
- Afrasiabi, Maleki, Abbas, 2003, "Iran's foreign policy after 11 September," *The Brown Journal of International Affairs* 4(2): 255-264.
- Ansari, Ali, 2003, "Continuous regime change from within," *Washington Quarterly* 26(4): 53-67.
- Bayman, Daniel et al., 2001, "Iran's security policy in the post — revolutionary era," *Rand*, pp.86-87.
- Drezner, Daniel, 1999, *The Sanction Paradox: Economic Statecraft and International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Farahi, Farideh and Hadian Nasser 2004, In Kemp Geoffery, *Iran's Bomb: American and Iranian Perspectives*, Nixon Center, Washington, DC, March.
- Gasiorowski, Mark J., 1991, *US Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp.28-32.
- Hunter, Shireen T., 1990, *Iran and the World*, Indiana: Indiana University Press
- Institute for International Economics, 2001 "Case Studies in Sanctions and Terrorism US v. Iran," *Case* 84(1).
- Iran Today*, 2001, "US Sanctions against Iran: Time for Reassessment," Opinion Editorial, January.
- Jentelsson, W. Bruce 2002, "Economic Sanctions and Post-Cold War Conflict," In Paul Stern and Dniel Druckman, eds., *International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War*, Washington, D.C: National Academy Press, pp. 3-15.
- Kamal Nazer Yasin, 2005, "Iran: new direction?" *Middle East International* 3 (August), at <http://meionline.com/feature/390.shtml>.
- Kemp, Geoffery, 2004, "US-Iranian strategic cooperation since 1979, In Sokolski, Henryand and Clawson Patrick, *Checking Iran's Nuclear Ambition*, Strategic Studies Institute, January.
- Khomeini, Rouhollah, 1981, "Islamic government," In Hamid Algar (Translated and Annotated), *Islam and Revolution: Writing and Declaration of Imam Khomeini*, Berkeley, pp.59-61.
- Ramazani, R.K., 1990 "Iran's foreign policy: contending orientation," In Ramazani, R.K., ed, *Iran's Revolution: the Search for Consensus*, IN: Bloomington, Indiana University Press, pp. 52-64.
- Sick, Gary, 1985, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*, New York: Random House Inc.
- Simbar, Reza, 2005, "Iran and the US: Engagement or confrontation," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 13 (1):73-89
- Simbar, Reza, 2005, "The prospect for crisis management and non-violent sustainable cooperation," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of international Relations* 4(4):57-78.

Tekyeh, Ray, 2000, "God's will: Iranian democracy and the Islamic Context," *Middle East Policy* VII(4): 41-49

Tekyeh, Ray, 2002, "Re-Imaging US-Iranian relations," *Survival* 44(3): 23-36.

*Keyhan* 17/11/2005.

*Middle East International* 3/8/2005.