

# USADI Dispatch

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## USADI Commentary

### Iran's 1979 Revolution - Twenty Six Years Later

February 10 marked the twenty-sixth anniversary of Iran's 1979 anti-monarchic revolution. The fundamentalists, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, succeeded in hijacking the 1979 revolution where decades of political suppression eliminated a genuinely nationalist and democratic alternative to the Shah's regime. The mullahs took advantage of the power vacuum and consolidated their reign.

Lacking the capacity to move Iran toward democracy and development, Khomeini's theocracy embarked on establishing its pillars of power through demagoguery and brute force. The Friday prayer sermons became a place to spew out venomous invective against any voice calling for democracy, branding the opposition groups as "hypocrites", "anti-Islam", and "pro-American."

Tens of thousands of political activists were executed or imprisoned in the name of God, and political groups, women, ethnic and religious minorities were subjected to a harsh crackdown. By the early 1981, there was nothing left of the republicanism of the "Islamic Republic"; the theocracy was in full swing.

Externally, Tehran pursued a deadly and intransigent foreign policy of "exporting revolution," or as the world came to know, exporting fundamentalism and terrorism. The mullahs' regime vowed to "liberate Jerusalem via Karbala" and made asymmetric warfare become the cornerstone of its military doctrine that relied on development of weapons of mass destruction.

A quarter century later, however, the mullahs' theocratic regime has grinded to a halt. And with capitulation of the "reformist" faction of Khatami, the fallacy of "change from within" has come to an embarrassing end.

Meanwhile, Iran's secular democracy movement has endured and expanded. Contrary to assertions by the engagement advocates, Iran is in a "pre-revolutionary" period. The 1999 student uprisings gave the world a glimpse of the explosive dynamic of Iran's younger generation. A report by the Council on Foreign Relations Iran Task Force's said last summer, "Iran's theocratic system is deeply unpopular with its citizenry... across a wide spectrum of age, class, and ethnic and religious backgrounds."

The CFR's report added that Iran rulers "have repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to preserve the regime by crushing anti-regime protests and imprisoning or even killing their political opponents." Indeed, the Islamic Republic's immense capacity to suppress political dissent is shielding this house of cards from its citizens.

The tyrants in Tehran would be very vulnerable in the face of a popular uprising if their capacity to crush anti-regime protests could be undercut. They are far more susceptible to the yearning of Iranians for freedom than sanctions, naval blockades, or a military strike.

Indeed, standing with Iran's organized anti-fundamentalist and democratic opposition is the true strategic leverage Washington has over the mullahs. The ludicrous idea that we can dissuade the mullahs by an economic package demonstrates dangerous naiveté about the nature of the clerical regime.

In his State of the Union Address, President Bush pledged to the Iranian people, "As you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you." Left to their own devices the mullahs will never stop suppressing Iranians, closing down their torture chambers and dismantling the gallows. Therefore, Washington must move to empower Iranians' resistance movement for freedom to tear down this wall of suppression to pave the way for the Iranians to bring down this tyranny.

This support should include reaching out to anti-fundamentalist Iranian opposition groups. To his end, a meaningful first step would be to end the terrorist designation of Iran's main opposition group, the Iranian People's Mujahedeen. Other Iran policy experts have made similar demands.

Last week, Iran Policy Committee comprised of former administration officials and foreign policy experts, released a policy paper entitled "U.S. Policy Options for Iran," calling for "a central role for the Iranian opposition to facilitate regime change." IPC stressed that "Removing the MEK's terrorist designation would be a tangible signal to Tehran and to the Iranian people that a new option is implicitly on the table—regime change."

Neither "selective engagement" nor a military strike represents viable options in dealing with Iran's increasing threat. Ironically, either approach would in different ways perpetuate the clerical regime. This "outpost of tyranny" should and could be brought down by Iranian people's organized resistance.

The US Alliance for Democratic Iran (USADI), is an independent, non-profit organization, which aims to advance a US policy on Iran that will benefit America's interests, through supporting Iranian people's aspirations for a democratic, secular, and peaceful government, free of tyranny, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. The USADI is not affiliated with any government agencies, political groups or parties.

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## United Press International

### February 10, 2005

### A third option for Iran

WASHINGTON -- President George W. Bush, in his State of the Union address issued a not-so veiled warning to Iran, for pursuing its nuclear weapons program. Earlier this week, Condoleezza Rice also warned Iran while on her first European tour as secretary of state. A number of Washington think tanks are jumping into the fray, calling either for dialogue or more muscle to be applied. The Iran Policy Committee, a new Washington group of former Middle East experts, offers a third alternative to negotiations, which they say are getting nowhere, or the military option, which they view as adventurous. The IPC supports regime change in Tehran, though they advocate doing so by supporting and empowering the Iranian resistance from within.

More specifically, the IPC want the U.S. government to support one particular group, the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq. But first, they need to convince the Bush administration to remove off the U.S. State Department's terrorist list.

IPC is comprised of former U.S. officials who have worked on the Middle East in the White House, State Department, Pentagon, intelligence agencies, Congress, and experts from think tanks and universities, such as former Ambassador James Akins, Paul Leventhal, founder of the Nuclear Control Institute, Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney, former assistant vice chief of staff of the Air Force, Bruce McCole, of the Institute for Democratic strategies, Raymond Tanter, a former member of the National Security Council under Ronald Reagan and Clare Lopez, a former intelligence analyst...

IPC's argument strongly favors the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, an organization designated as a "terrorist group" by the U.S. State Department since 1997... That said, the MEK are probably largest and the better organized than any other Iranian opposition group. Females constitute nearly a third of its rank and file...

Some U.S. policy advisers are urging refrain from the Bush administration. They oppose harsh action with Tehran because they interpret recent developments in Iran as pointing to an impending collapse of the system, much along the lines of the implosion that led to the end of the communist regime in the Soviet Union. Other policymakers advocate engagement.

The middle option, as presented by the IPC, "encourages a campaign of destabilization," to weaken the grip of the ruling regime over the Iranian people sufficiently that Iranian opposition groups inside the country and abroad are empowered to change the regime. IPC recommends backing the MEK, whom they say enjoys "indisputable support," as it is the largest and most organized Iranian opposition group. It claims there are nearly 3,800 of its members in Camp Ashraf, 60 miles north of Baghdad. In its support of the MEK, the Iran policy Committee requests that in the event "Unites States reach a decision to support an explicit policy of regime change in Iran," calls for a Presidential Finding on the MEK as a first step," which would open the door to future cooperation...

## San Francisco Chronicle

### February 9, 2005

### Emerging strategy against Tehran

In recent weeks, the Bush administration has toughened its stand against the fundamentalist Shiite Muslim government of Iran, calling it one of America's key enemies.

But the administration has not yet presented a clear-cut strategy for dealing with Iran, instead hinting alternately that the solution may be European-led negotiations with Tehran, an Israeli military attack or a rebellion led by the Iranian opposition...

In place of negotiations, the administration and many members of Congress seem to be suggesting that the Iranian people should revolt. In his State of the Union speech, Bush seemed to signal such an approach, saying, "To the Iranian people, I say tonight: As you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you."

Last month, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., introduced the Iran Freedom Support Act, which would authorize direct aid to opposition radio and television stations. The bill was co-sponsored by Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, and 49 other House members. A likely recipient of this aid would be NITV, a Los Angeles satellite station that beams its programs into Iran 24 hours a day...

The key tool in this strategy is the Mujahedeen-e Khalq, an Iranian guerrilla force that has 4,000 fighters housed in a U.S.-guarded military base north of Baghdad. This group, known as MEK, is supported by some Washington neoconservatives and liberals, as well as by many European lawmakers, but nonetheless has been designated since 1997 as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department.

The group has suspended its guerrilla activities within Iran since 2001, apparently hoping to improve its international reputation....

The MEK's Paris-based civilian leadership avoids openly appealing for U.S. aid but makes clear that it sees itself as a U.S. ally...