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April 26, 2010

Iran: From Theocracy to Democracy



By **Reza Pahlavi**

These are very troubling times for my country. The searing images on YouTube, Facebook and other media have brought the misery of the Iranian people and the brutality of the clerical regime into vivid perspective.

The events surrounding the fraudulent election in June 2009 caused the people of Iran to reach their point of no return, and the regime to abandon all pretenses of faith, national pride, and humanity. The people of Iran achieved something unprecedented in the history of the 31-year-old Islamic Republic: for the first time, they coordinated mass-scale demonstrations against this totalitarian theocratic regime. These demonstrations and protests continue even today, questioning - well beyond the election results of last June - the very legitimacy of the regime and the so-called Supreme Leader Khamenei.

The first and most tangible result of the Green Movement is that the world, today, has a far better understanding of the true nature of the Islamic Republic on the one hand, and the true wishes and aspirations of the Iranian people on the other. The black veil has been torn off the face of the regime. Ultimately, I am confident my country will be liberated from this darkness, thanks to our heroic youth whose eyes are firmly on the future.

In truth, what is going on in Iran today has been years in the making. Inside Iran, people continue to seize every opportunity to chip away at the regime's authority. Abroad, members of the diaspora continue to raise awareness of their compatriots' struggle back home. I am encouraged by and pleased to witness how the terrible events in Iran have galvanized my compatriots around the world. Our collective salvation from this nightmare lies in democracy and an absolute non-negotiable commitment to human rights for every single Iranian. Our unity will expedite Iran's salvation.

Since the events of the summer of 2009, the world has also grown more attentive to the issue of human rights abuses in Iran. In its annual report on human rights released last month, the U.S. State Department expressed the opinion that, despite heavy international pressure on the clerical regime, "the human rights situation in Iran has degenerated since last summer's disputed presidential election." Dozens of members of religious minorities, including Baha'is, Christians and Jews remain in prison in Iran on dubious charges, often denied basic rights such as access to their attorneys. Amnesty International has identified cases of academics, doctors, journalists, artists, and union leaders, all of whom have been denied their basic rights and imprisoned.

More and more, the solution points towards a systemic political change in Iran. The clerical constitution is fundamentally flawed and in order to move Iran forward it must be replaced. The so-called Islamic Regime, as defined by its Constitution, includes too many undemocratic principles and institutions; hence its government could not be in any way representative of and in service to the people. And, as was finally learned last summer, no number of "elections" can remedy the system's shortcomings. Within the confines of the Islamic Republic's constitution, there is simply no legal method by which the people of Iran can hold the regime accountable.

For the future of Iran, I have always advocated the establishment of a secular democracy, where there is a clear separation of mosque from state. My personal preference is for a future constitution based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I am confident that, given adequate time and discourse in the public domain, a secular democracy will be the choice of the vast majority of Iranians, particularly for today's youth. When sovereignty is restored back to the people, this time, they will want a government which will be legitimate, representative, accountable, transparent, and thus sustainable.

The role of the international community remains quite important. It must refrain from engaging in conduct that hinders the Iranian people in their struggle for freedom and strengthens the dictatorship against which they are fighting. As an example, companies like Nokia and Siemens should be held accountable and denounced for selling technology to the clerical regime that helps the regime spy on the Iranian people.

The world should also take as historical examples the Solidarity movement in Poland and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. The free world heard their cries for freedom and finally committed to change the status-quo and help bring an end to those undesirable regimes. In both cases, there was a tremendous international support as well as direct pressure on the respective governments at the time to aid the popular movements. We bear witness to the 21st-century's first great struggle for human dignity. My compatriots use the Internet to take on one of the most brutal regimes in the world, and they take it on with courage and conviction. The use of new technologies makes me believe totalitarianism will soon be a thing of the past. The truth can get around the world in a nano-second. We must all continue telling the truth about Iran and her people.

Heed the words of Dr. Martin Luther King who said: "In the end, we will forget the words of our enemies, but we will not soon forget the silence of our friends."

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