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U.S. policy must factor in changed landscape in Iran

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Written by [Dr. Trita Parsi](#)

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by Trita Parsi and Muhammad Sahimi

The protests in Iran over the past few weeks have shown that the opposition in Iran is not going away. In fact, while the regime is shrinking, the opposition is growing and gaining momentum. For the West, this has significant implications. With nuclear diplomacy at a deadlock following internal Iranian divisions, the mass demonstrations underline the folly of a singular focus on nuclear matters in the midst of Iran's historic upheavals.

Almost seven months after the elections, the Green Movement continues to deprive Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of any sense of normalcy. It is not surprising that the two are finding themselves playing defense. They increasingly focused on retaining their shrinking base, rather than creating divisions within the Greens.

But even here, they are failing. Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's funeral and the subsequent demonstrations last month showed once again the deep fissures within the conservative camp. These divisions grew even greater following Mir Hossin Mousavi's statement on Jan. 1, in which he proposed a way out of the present crisis.

Furthermore, the internal strife has distracted the hardliners and slowed down Iran's uranium enrichment program. Fewer centrifuges are spinning at Natanz, and smaller amounts of low-enriched uranium are being produced. The Obama administration itself has indicated through leaks that Iran doesn't have a credible breakout capability in the short run. That means that the urgency of the nuclear clock isn't as great as was assumed a few months ago.

Europe and the U.S.'s policies toward Iran must factor in this new political landscape. We must also recognize the Green movement's ability to alter the course of Iran's internal and external dynamics and behavior, and cease to craft its policies in defiance of that reality.

The internal Iranian clock may not be ticking as fast as the West would like, but we would ignore it at our own peril. The Green Movement plans to flex its muscles again in the coming weeks on the anniversary of the 1979 Revolution and the traditional mourning on the 40th day after Montazeri's death.

This will coincide with renewed efforts at the UN Security Council to impose new sanctions on Iran due to the ongoing nuclear dispute. To pursue this path without factoring in the momentous developments inside Iran — and how it can affect them — would be a grave mistake.

The West should not do anything that would harm the Green Movement, including imposing broad economic sanctions on Iran that would hurt ordinary Iranians and provide a pretext for the hardliners to intensify their repression of the movement.

The Obama administration has recognized the importance of not alienating the Iranian people under these circumstances. "Our goal is to pressure the Iranian government, particularly the Revolutionary Guard elements," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said this week, "without contributing to the suffering of ordinary [Iranians]."

This is critical and a paradigm shift in Washington's approach to Iran sanctions. But the policy must match the rhetoric.

Given that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) controls a very significant fraction of Iran's official and underground economy, it would be difficult to identify effective sanctions that can hurt only the IRGC, while sparing the regular population. Thus, the prudent policy would be to try to target the main figures of the regime individually.

At the same time, even if some sanctions can be identified that hurt IRGC companies, with minimal damage to the ordinary Iranians, their imposition should be accompanied by lifting existing sanctions that have contributed to the suffering of ordinary Iranians. These would include sanctions on medicines, on spare parts for Iran's aging civilian aircrafts, on information technology and IT services, as well as on charitable donations to Iranian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). That would reassure the Iranian people that the targets are the hardliners, not them.

The bottom line is that the West has tried — unsuccessfully — to synchronize the internal Iranian clock with the nuclear clock. It wants the Green movement to run a 100-meter sprint, whereas in reality they are running a marathon. It's time to try a different approach, one in which the Iranian democracy clock is given priority, and the strategy on nuclear and security matters are adjusted accordingly.

This would mean an engagement policy that focuses on human rights and not just the nuclear issue; a time-frame for diplomacy that factors in Iran's domestic developments; sanctions that target responsible actors in the government and not ordinary people; and a recognition that no security deal is sustainable if it comes at the expense of the pro-democracy aspirations of the Iranian people.

Parsi is the president of the National Iranian American Council and the 2010 recipient of the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order. An Iran analyst, Sahimi is a professor of engineering at the University of Southern California.

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A. Peasant said:



... good video. and what is best for the american people? that does not come into the complex calculus of imperial mobilization either. and lo, if the american people would but notice THAT the people at goldman sachs, who run the treasury, and the people of the fed, and israel, and the israeli lobby, and the many smart people working in think tanks, and their corporate sponsors, and all our politicians -- these are the very same people designing and financing the plans for imperial mobilization which hurt americans on the way to hurting brown people far far away.

and just because someone very nicely calls something "green," or whatever focus group terminology they determine will elicit the proper response, that is no guarantee of any good motive. it's just marketing. and just because someone comes from the country in the cross-hairs and has an opinion, that does not necessarily means anything either. they could be mercenaries -- expert witnesses.

people must learn to rely on their common sense and not be so impressed by complexity and credentials. the idea that world problems are too complicated for us to understand is a lie. as long as time only goes in one direction -- forward -- ordinary people are perfectly capable of making practical and just calculations and assessments of good policy. as long as they have the facts, but that's a whole other pail of worms...

January 21, 2010 | [url](#)

Project Humanbeingsfirst.org said:



Still, what's wrong with the American War Paar Da?

I am not sure what you mean here: "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if Israel and the US Treasury Department like the idea, maybe it's not the best thing for the Iranian people."

When did the issue of what's the "best thing for the Iranian people" ever enter into the complex calculus of "imperial mobilization", "full spectrum dominance", and "hegemony is as old as mankind" designed to culminate in a One-world Order of the financial bankster elite who fund the American War Paarda?

The Hegelian Dialectic and Noble Lies is good for someone - I see no rational exposition of why it must also be good for everyone:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcMJZP_BLvY

Admit it - might not only makes right, but Might HAS Rights!

Thanks.

Zahir Ebrahim
Project Humanbeingsfirst.org

January 21, 2010 | [url](#)

A. Peasant said:



Israel and the US Treasury like the Iranian opposition too

Well let's ask ourselves: Who wants regime change in Iran? A quick google search lands two suspicious results in short order:

1. Danny Ayalon, who, by the way, just made an a** of himself in the very serious diplomatic incident with Turkey, (mainstream spin on that matter notwithstanding), said as reported on 1/3/10 in Haaretz:

"It is not certain that the regime in power now in Iran will be there in one year," Ayalon said at a question-and-answer session in Tel Aviv. "The world is uniting against Iran's nuclear program and within a month there will be United Nations Security Council sanctions," Ayalon said. "There is agreement in Washington, Moscow and Beijing that a nuclear Iran would destroy the current world order."

haaretz: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1139357.html>

2. Jay Solomon of The Wall Street Journal, that bastion of democracy, reports that the US Treasury Department (full of (ex- wink wink)Goldman Sachs employees, as we know), has been figuring out ways to help out the opposition:

U.S. Treasury Department strategists already have been focusing on Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has emerged as the economic and military power behind Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In recent weeks, senior Green Movement figures - who have been speaking at major Washington think tanks -- have made up a list of IRGC-related companies they suggest targeting, which has been forwarded to the Obama administration by third parties.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB126300060937222569.html>

Third parties? If only Jay Solomon could name them....

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if Israel and the US Treasury Department like the idea, maybe it's not the best thing for the Iranian people. But that's just Common Sense, which is, evidently, Not Allowed. !!!

It's always better to listen to people with many degrees who work at think tanks and have impressive Curriculum Vitae. Then we don't have to think for ourselves.

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Project Humanbeingsfirst.org said:



There is no problem with this article!

Unless of course you think being an asset of the hectoring hegemon is a problem! Here is the bio of the respected author:

"Dr. Trita Parsi is the author of Treacherous Alliance - The Secret Dealings of Iran, Israel and the United States (Yale University Press, 2007.)

He wrote his Doctoral thesis on Israeli-Iranian relations under Professor Francis Fukuyama (and Drs. Zbigniew Brzezinski, R. K. Ramazani, Jakub Grygiel, Charles Doran) at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies while heading the largest Iranian-American organization in the US, the National Iranian American Council (NIAC)."

So if you think there is a problem with the article, then you must also think there is a problem with "Hegemony is as old as mankind" - one of Dr. Trita Parsi's thesis advisor's very sentence of his 1996 book "The Grand Chessboard" ; and his main thesis advisor's thesis: "The End of History?" which heralded the advent of the New Atlantis and the end of all social evolution of man, which, as WIKI puts it: "liberal democracy may signal the end point of humanity's sociocultural evolution" - and which I humbly put in another 'chosen peoples' simplified vernacular as: "the Zion that will light up all the world"!

So, if you insist that Mr. Trita Parsi's article has something deficient in it, can you first show what's wrong with any of what his illustrious mentors have taught him?

Why is it wrong to be a hectoring hegemon? To spin lies and deception? After all, isn't truth entirely relative, and subjected only to the exigencies and expediencies a more absolute definition of which would only put national security in a semantic straight-jacket as was eloquently stated by a US Supreme Court Justice:

"Nothing is more certain in modern society than the principle that there are no absolutes, that a name, a phrases, a standard has meaning only when associated with the considerations which give birth to nomenclature. To those who would paralyze our Government in the face of impending threat by encasing it in a semantic strait-jacket, we must reply that all concepts are relative." -- Justice Vinson, U.S. Supreme Court, 1951 AD

And as I had asked once before on the celebrated occasion of the 40th anniversary of Noam Chomsky's famous essay but received no enlightenment from the entire Western Hemispheric pious and intellectualism heralding in the end of history:

<http://www.humanbeingsfirst.blogspot.com/2007/03/responsibility-of-intellectuals-redux.html>

In Havel's self-apportioning of responsibility to intellectuals, himself being one, there is no mention of why the intellectual must have such responsibilities. Why does he or she needs to be an 'irritant', why must he or she 'rebel against all hidden and open pressure and manipulation', and be the 'chief doubter of systems, of power and its incantations'? Why may the intellectual not be an exponent of Machiavelli in the service of the powerful, of 'power and its incantations', telling 'Nobel Lies' to serve the ruling interests? After all, those who run 'systems' also need intellectual and doctrinal backbone to carry them out, don't they?

So why - unless the above is self-explanatory!

Thanks.

Zahir Ebrahim
only a plebe
Project Humanbeingsfirst.org

January 20, 2010 | [url](#)

Parviz Mirbaghi said:



...
A problem with your article is that you write as if the West, particularly U.S., is a do-gooder with clean hands. Do you honestly think that U.S. is interested in a free and independent Iran? Just look at the small long-suffering nation of Haiti, America couldn't even tolerate Aristide there! And if you want U.S. to care about human rights you have to be naive, U.S. that trained the SAVAK police, the U.S. that is not moved by the massacre and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, the U.S. that is behind the withering away of people's sovereignty everywhere with its pursuit of corporate globalization, privatization policies, the U.S. with its complete lack of respect for the environment, and doesn't even care for ordinary Americans, and, and, and...you want this fetid Administration to help in genuine reform in Iran?!!! Instead why not contribute towards a more clear articulation of what needs to change in the benefit of Irani people and forget about U.S.

January 19, 2010

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