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Mullahs & the Report

The religious, terrorist dictatorship in Iran was the only party to welcome the State Department report on the Mojahedin. The mullahs expressed their gratitude to the Department, and vociferously attacked Congress and the American public's call for an objective report as a "Zionist conspiracy."¹

For years, one of the mullahs' main foreign policy objectives has been to restrict the activities of the Iranian opposition. The clerics have approached this goal by various means, sometimes promising favored trading status and sometimes using terrorism to intimidate democratic countries. For obvious reasons, Tehran has been obsessed with countering the NCR and the Mojahedin, which it sees as its main threat.

In 1985, Khomeini demanded that the U.S. condemn the Mojahedin in return for the release of Americans held hostage in Lebanon.² During the same period, his first and foremost demand from France was restrictions on the activities of Massoud Rajavi, in return for the freedom of French hostages and better economic ties with Paris. In any case, appeasing Khomeini did not lessen his bent for terrorism. On the contrary, buckling under only propelled his regime down a more violent path. The American shipment of TOW anti-tank missiles and unwarranted statement on the Mojahedin in 1985 did not bring about the freedom of American hostages; the regime simply raised the stakes. Nor did the U.S.'s miscalculated policy bolster any "moderates," simply because they do not exist, then or now. After Massoud Rajavi's departure from France in 1986, Khomeini's regime sought greater concessions, and pressed its demands with a wave of bombings in Paris that led to the deaths of more than a dozen French citizens.³

Fundamental Demands

In the past year, the regime's deteriorating state has compelled it to lay increasing emphasis on this fundamental demand in dealings with foreign countries. In a rare and diplomatically unusual move, the regime's Foreign Minister summoned all ambassadors in Tehran to the Ministry twice in July to tell them in effect that their governments had to choose between his government and the Mojahedin.⁴ The tactic was apparently unsuccessful, so the regime began to fabricate statements against the Mojahedin, supposedly made by officials of other countries. In early summer, *Ressalat* newspaper reported a remark purported to have been made by the British chargé d'affaires to Sa'id Raja'i-Khorassani, a parliamentary deputy: "The English Government condemns the atrocious terrorist acts of the *Monafegin* (Mojahedin) in Mashad and stresses that this group's terrorist record is clear to the English authorities..." Lord Henley, spokesman for the British Government, told the House of Lords: "The newspaper did not accurately report the chargé d'affaires' meeting with Dr. Khorassani."⁵ Douglas Hogg, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, informed Lord Avebury in a letter that *Ressalat* had "blatantly misrepresented Mr. James's comments on the Mashad bomb."⁶

The incident is typical of Tehran's desperate efforts to compel officials of other countries to condemn the democratic opposition. Such statements serve to justify its brutal internal suppression of dissent and so-called "war on terrorism." They also justify the regime's international terrorism against opponents outside Iran, which has risen to over 100 terrorist operations.⁷

This explains why in January 1994, the clerics welcomed the proposal of the McCain amendment,⁸ replete with baseless charges against the Mojahedin. Referring to earlier Senate condemnations of human rights abuses in Iran, *Jomhuri Islami* newspaper wrote: "It is said that there is a new tone to the new American foreign policy bill taken up by the Senate. The legislation stresses that the People's Mojahedin Organization has been involved in terrorist activities since its inception in 1963."⁹

In an article on the McCain amendment, *U.S.-Iran Review* - published by FAIR, the regime's lobby in Washington - wrote:

Should McCain's amendment be retained and become law, its significance

will go far beyond simply requiring yet another State Department report. As McCain points out, such a report would allow Congress... and the media... to "consider the source." The Mojahedin has been the source of much misinformation and exaggeration about Iran, understandingly enough, since its aim is to overthrow the current regime. Many articles and columnists in the popular media use the Mojahedin as if it were a credible source. Congress would be well served to be made aware of the background of the PMOI and thus be cautious in assessing information received from them.

But perhaps more significant would be the balance brought to the State Department terrorism report by the McCain requirement. The State Department's accusation that Iran is "the most dangerous state sponsor of terrorism in 1992" is based on charges that Iran has assassinated political opponents. Note that it is difficult to comment authoritatively on exactly who is behind the various killings, since hard evidence is not available or is currently being investigated in courts in Europe.

What is often disregarded in articles about Iran's alleged state-sponsored murders is the fact that most of these killings (with a few inexplicable exceptions), as inexcusable as they are, appear to be part of a broad cycle of violence. Iran's political opponents, including the Mojahedin and Kurdish separatists, are violently attacking Iran, often killing civilians in cross-border raids and terrorist-type attacks.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the McCain amendment would likely be received in Tehran as one bit of concrete evidence that the United States is not seeking to overthrow the Islamic Republic. Statements by several U.S. officials, including the recent ones by Martin Indyk and Anthony Lake, have said that the United States is not trying to overthrow the regime. However, Iran likely suspects that the United States' greatest wish is to topple the Islamic regime, and the access to Congress and the media by the Mojahedin only contribute to that impression. Iran also suspects that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency is funding and supporting the Mojahedin, along with Iran's other arch enemy, Iraq. Simply reporting on the Mojahedin's terrorist activity would do much to alter that view.¹⁰

The commentaries are clear about what it is the mullahs want. Significantly, State Department officials began their calls for a dialogue with Tehran at about the same time the McCain amendment first appeared.¹¹ The regime reacted by reporting the development widely in its press, as a sign of American weakness. *Jomhuri Islami* wrote:

Political analysts view these comments as an admission to the failure of all of the U.S.'s hostile efforts against Iran in the past years... The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State is expressing his willingness to have a dialogue with Iran as the European countries continue to pressure the U.S. to resolve its difficulties with the Islamic Republic.¹²

Eventually, the paper published Khamenei's answer:

His Reverence, Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, revealed the U.S.'s motives for a dialogue with Iran in his November 4 address last year on the occasion of the seizure of the U.S. nest of spies. He stressed that the nation of Iran does not need dialogue and contact with an arrogant enemy such as the United States.¹³

As could be expected, the conciliatory messages by officials of the State Department had only raised the stakes. *Kayhan International* daily suggested that the United States accept several preconditions to facilitate negotiations to resolve differences between the two countries.¹⁴

Just days before the State Department released its report, *Kayhan Havai*, a state-run weekly published for Iranians abroad, wrote:

While little time remains before the State Department submits its report on the terrorist nature of Rajavi's grouplet to that country's Congress, Zionist circles in the media and Congress of the United States have begun a tremendous campaign to divert the course and conclusions of this investigative report. The U.S. State Department has called Rajavi's grouplet a terrorist organization and this country's Congress has mandated the State Department to report on the group's nature and actions.¹⁵

Obviously, the regime had prior knowledge of the report's pronouncements, or it would not have spoken of congressional efforts to "divert the course and conclusions." It is also clear that contrary to the principle of objectivity stressed by Congress, the State Department had reached its conclusions long before any investigation and had, as the state-run Iranian paper said, branded the Mojahedin as a "terrorist organization."

The *Kayhan Havai* article attested that calling the Mojahedin "terrorists" was a two-sided coin, the other side of which was rapprochement with the regime. It wrote:

Several months before, Robert Pelletreau had stated in a report to the U.S. Congress on Iran and future bilateral relations that the U.S. does not really seek to overthrow the government of Iran and that it considered the Tehran government as a permanent feature.¹⁶

Salam, another state-controlled Tehran daily, commented:

Insecurity in Iraq and a European cold shoulder, have made the [Mojahedin] turn as never before to the U.S. They have tried to use the influence of the Zionists to find a haven for themselves in the States. The Zionist influence in the U.S.'s decision-making bodies has prevented Washington from legally ending the terrorist group's activities in the U.S., despite the State Department's position that they are terrorists.¹⁷

Report Cheered

Immediately after the report's publication, IRNA reported:

The U.S. State Department in an official statement had admitted that the MKO was a terrorist group. The U.S. took such an open stance despite attempts by the Zionists to receive approval of the Americans for the MKO. As a result, the terrorist group which had pinned hope on the U.S. support was all at once entrapped in a political impasse.¹⁸

When you consider the regime's wish list, as laid out in the FAIR article, it is clear that the State Department report was more than generous. The Tehran regime had long awaited just such a move to justify its bloody record of suppression. A *Tehran Times* editorial referred to the report as "indicative of a rude awakening in the West, an awakening to the fact that they should not take claims by dubious freedom fighters at face value, that whatever the Islamic Republic was saying all along against the unprincipled, murderous MKO was all true."¹⁹ In a report on this article, IRNA added:

Turning to the anger of Western officials at the terrorist MKO for leading them to believe that they were the voice of reason and restraint and for hiding their true nature as mercenaries for Saddam, the paper termed their anger as natural saying no victim was ever free from anger against the victimizer.²⁰

Another daily, *Jomhuri Islami*, expressed satisfaction at the report as well, saying:

The U.S. State Department has declared that the Monafeqin are terrorists tied to Saddam Hussein, and the U.S. would never count on them in a future Iran because they have no support among the Iranian people.²¹

In a fabricated account of an attack by the Mojahedin on a diplomatic automobile belonging to the regime in Denmark, IRNA reported: "Political observers believe that the attack on the Iranian diplomats took place in a bid to bring the organization out of the

present deadlock and at the same time encourage its agents in Baghdad." As usual, Tehran complained of the State Department's delay in taking such a stance:

If Western governments which would term the MKO as a terrorist organization in their private talks and unpublished statements, had openly announced their point of view towards the grouplet, no doubt the terrorists would not have been emboldened as such to attack the diplomats.²²

The state-controlled daily, *Abrar*, wrote that the U.S. State Department report "points to the group's inability to take power in Iran and describes the group as a puppet and undemocratic tool of the Iraqi government."²³ An Arabic language paper reported:

An Iranian Foreign Ministry source welcomed the report and said, on condition of anonymity, "This report strengthens the hand of those Iranian factions that are still trying to conduct a constructive dialogue with Washington."²⁴

In another article, *Jomhuri Islami* wrote,

Despite tremendous Zionist pressures in Congress, the U.S. State Department was forced to admit to the [Mojahedin's] terrorist nature... The report said that the group had a 29-year-record of undemocratic behavior, including a series of assassinations, kidnappings, intimidation, armed insurrection and suppression of dissent... Some of the documents referred to in the report are letters sent by Iraqis to the U.S. State Department, testifying that their relatives in the 1991 insurrection of the Iraqi people against the Baathist rule were killed by joint execution squads of Baathists and [Mojahedin]... The [Mojahedin's] denials of responsibility for terrorist acts have not been accepted. Likewise, their claims about pursuing a free-minded democracy have not been accepted...²⁵

Based on reports from Iran, the mullahs are making the most of the report to bring pressure to bear on political prisoners. It is represented as vindication of Khomeini's *fatwa* declaring: "The Mojahedin, their members and supporters alike, are all condemned to death and there is no need for a trial."²⁶

The Consequences

A Scud missile attack on a base of the National Liberation Army of Iran only a week after the report's publication was viewed by a

journal on Middle Eastern affairs as the result of a green light to Tehran from Washington:

Iran appears to have considered carefully the possible diplomatic effects of its decision to launch the cross-border attacks and decided that the initiative was worth the risk... What appeared to convince the Iranians, correctly it seems, that they had effectively been given the green light from the West was the fact that the U.S. State Department had in October denounced the MKO for being profoundly undemocratic and unrepresentative of the Iranian people.²⁷

Salam tried to gloss over the facts in response to a reader's question: "I wanted to know the connection between the U.S. State Department's report in favor of Iran and against the [Mojahedin], and Iran's missile attack on their base in Iraq." The reply: "Although the timing of the attack and the statement that describes the [Mojahedin] as terrorist may lead one to make such a conclusion" that is not the case.²⁸

Mahmoud Mohammadi, the regime's Foreign Ministry spokesman, defended the attack with arguments about the regime being "the greatest victim of a wave of terrorism." He referred to the State Department report that described the [Mojahedin] as terrorist and said: "It is indicative of the rightfulness of our position. For years we have said, and provided numerous documents attesting that they are terrorists, and now the Islamic Republic has been vindicated as never before."²⁹

After having accused the democratic opposition in Iran of being "violent", "terrorist", "tied to Iraq," having "no popular base," etc., Washington could hardly condemn Tehran's efforts to destroy so "undesirable" a movement, even though in doing so the regime had broken international laws. Furthermore, the Department is evidently well aware that any position critical of the regime on an issue that concerns the Mojahedin and NCR, is detrimental to its hopes of a dialogue with this "international outlaw." Two days after the missile attack, Tehran felt secure enough from an international protest to try bombing an NLA base. The attacking jet fighters were driven off by anti-aircraft fire, but managed to strike at Kurdish bases in the no-fly zone in northern Iraq, completely controlled by American warplanes.³⁰ Again, there was no reaction from the U.S. State Department.

These events demonstrate that as long as such biased views prevail about the Iranian Resistance, tough talk by U.S. officials about the regime's outlaw behavior will have no effect. These events confirm that the *de facto* U.S. policy is nothing other than appeasing the mullahs at the expense of the Iranian people's Resistance movement. It is a policy that will only encourage more crimes. In the course of the Bakhtiar murder trial in Paris, in which two of the regime's agents were sentenced to life and ten-years, Khomeini's heirs did their utmost to use the State Department report to influence the verdict. In a letter to the court accompanied by the report, the regime's ambassador lashed out at the Mojahedin, saying that the best response is the State Department's. He tried to portray the regime as a victim of the Mojahedin's terrorism.³¹

Doing Their Best

While the report was being prepared, the regime tried through different channels to ensure that it would denounce the Mojahedin and reflect the mullahs' viewpoints. To this end, Rafsanjani's office and the regime's Foreign Ministry jointly prepared a plan, to be implemented under the supervision of Kamal Kharrazi, the regime's ambassador to the U.N. in New York. When Congress eventually stressed that it wanted a fair report, the clerics assailed the legislators and increased their efforts to provide the Department with bogus information against the Mojahedin.

In September, Tehran sent an unofficial emissary to the U.S. Ibrahim Yazdi, Iran's Foreign Minister in the period after the shah's overthrow, was well suited for the job. His son-in-law, Mehdi Noorbaksh who lives in the States, had been contacted by the State Department about the Mojahedin. Moreover, since Yazdi did not hold an official position in the regime, he had a free hand. Tehran had intended to keep his whereabouts unknown, at least until after the report's publication, but the Mojahedin learned through their sources in Iran of Mr. Yazdi's mission, and issued two statements on his visit.³² After his presence had been exposed, there was an attempt at damage control. An Iranian radio station arranged an interview with him, pretending that it had taken place in Iran. After the report was ultimately released, however, Yazdi gave a series of speeches in Washington. An Iranian journalist present in one of these meetings said: "In one of the seminars, participants realized that Yazdi had

come to the U.S. on a mission from the Islamic Republic."³³

According to an internal report by Mr. Rafsanjani's office, Kamal Kharrazi established contacts, through Ibrahim Yazdi, Bijan Sepasy and Houshang Amir Ahmadi, with a number of former U.S. officials and experts who advocated a policy of appeasement toward the regime. They hoped to prepare a statement against the Mojahedin, signed by these officials and experts, for submission to the State Department. The draft contained such allegations as "employing violence and terrorism," "lack of inter-organizational democracy and popular base," "threatening Iranians abroad," etc. In a confidential report to Tehran, Mr. Kharrazi expressed hope that individuals such as Richard Cottam, Gary Sick, Ervand Abrahamian, Ruhollah Ramazani, Nasta Ramazani, Bahman Bakhtiari, Mohammad Ja'far Mahallati and others would endorse the statement.³⁴ He added that these individuals had been in independent contact with the State Department.

Simultaneously, FAIR, the regime's lobby in Washington, launched its own campaign against the Mojahedin and the National Council of Resistance. FAIR was formed in summer 1992, following the House majority statement expressing support for the NCR. FAIR registered as the regime's agent with the Department of Justice, whose documents indicate a monthly stipend of \$20,000 from the regime's permanent mission at the United Nations. In addition, FAIR's president, Bijan Sepasy, received a monthly salary of \$10,000. Other expenses were paid for separately.³⁵

FAIR's activities included half-page ads in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, stating the State Department's position against the Mojahedin and attempting to portray the regime as a "victim of the Mojahedin's terrorism."³⁶ FAIR also sent letters to congressmen and other officials, which avoided identifying it as a registered lobby of the Iranian regime.³⁷ In a letter to Iranian-Americans, FAIR urged them to contact their elected representatives in Congress and discourage their support for the National Council of Resistance of Iran.³⁸ The letter, signed by Sepasy, describes the increasing support for the NCR in the U.S. Congress as an "emergency." Referring to the State Department position against the Mojahedin, he writes: "There are members of Congress—possibly yours—who mistakenly believe the Mujahedin-e-Khalq to be a legitimate voice of opposition to the present government in Iran. Why? Because the Mujahedin-e-Khalq

has been engaged in *intense lobbying*, backed by Iraqi money. Don't let this voice be the only one *your* member of Congress hears. Your help is urgently needed."³⁹ Previous reports by the State Department were included, along with the recommendation that in contacting their congressmen, Iranians should stress that the State Department is opposed to the Mojahedin. Thousands of Iranians who had received this letter sent copies to the NCR office in Washington, expressing their disdain at FAIR. When the campaign failed, the regime sent fraudulent letters to congressmen and government officials.

At the same time, the regime tried to feed the State Department erroneous information on the Mojahedin. For example, through an Iranian middleman, Nasser Khajenouri,⁴⁰ Tehran provided a list of 114 names of "former Mojahedin members." A number of these individuals are living in Iran, some are prison guards and torturers and others are well-known members of other groups, including several Marxist factions.⁴¹ The list was one of several propaganda gimmicks about "suppression of dissidents inside the Mojahedin organization," a threadbare allegation the regime brings out of mothballs every so often.

Towards the end of September, the Mojahedin received reliable reports from inside sources that officials in the regime expected an article against the organization to be published in the *Wall Street Journal* in early October. In a strange coincidence, in September the State Department also began referring the many requests it received for information on the Mojahedin to the *Wall Street Journal* reporter. The Mojahedin's Washington press office informed the editors of the *Wall Street Journal* of the matter.⁴²

Over the summer of 1994, the regime launched a sustained campaign of frenzied attacks on the Mojahedin by the state-controlled media. First appeared hysteric accusations about the Mojahedin being responsible for the tragic bombing of the holy shrine of *Imam Reza* (the eighth Shi'ite Imam). Next, they were blamed for the cowardly murders of three Christian clerics. The onslaught was so glaring it appeared odd, even to foreign observers and analysts. An informed journalist said at the time that apparently until the day the report comes out, the regime will be doing something every day to give the State Department the ammunition it needs.

Policy Options

There are two schools of thought concerning Iran among U.S. governmental and non-governmental policy planners, experts and specialists on Middle East and Iranian affairs. Some argue that the only effective approach is a show of decisiveness by the international community. Basing their argument on the experience of the past 16 years, they refute the notion of moderates or pragmatists within the regime, and stress the mullahs' active involvement in international terrorism, export of fundamentalism and chaos to regional countries, and staunch opposition to the peace process. They also say the regime is vigorously seeking to obtain nuclear technology and has an ambitious program to stockpile advanced weaponry. They point to efforts to attain long range missiles, and to Tehran's demonstrated readiness to use them. These experts raise the issue of flagrant human rights violations as well, viewing it as indicative of the regime's lack of popular support. They conclude that the U.S.'s interests are best served by a firm policy vis-a-vis the regime. Instead of investing in bogus "moderation," the U.S. should look to change by the Iranian people. This approach is endorsed by a significant block in Congress. In recent years, representatives and senators have singly and jointly issued statements calling for decisiveness, condemning the regime and supporting the NCR.

The opposing view is that, in due course, the current Iran regime will tone down and lose the fervor of extremism. Thus, the correct policy is to encourage the "moderate or pragmatist" faction. The proponents of this approach argue that any firmness toward the Tehran regime will only strengthen the "radicals" and delay the process of transmutation. Consequently, while these experts cannot deny the regime's extremist behavior and involvement in terrorism, they portray them as insignificant or the work of "rogue" factions within the regime. Sometimes they are depicted as largely Mojahedin propaganda.

James Bill explains the views of those courting the mullahs as follows: "This position also holds that Iran's connections with violence were fashioned through the enormous pressures, both internal and external, that were applied to Iran."⁴³ Referring to Iran's strategic location, they argue that the United States cannot remain indifferent toward Iran. To support their analysis, advocates inevitably reject

any opposition to the regime, portraying it instead as a permanent feature with which the U.S. must ultimately come to terms. Thus, their proposed course of action is to exercise "patience" vis-a-vis the regime until such time as the U.S. can arrive at an understanding with it. Though they seldom refer to it publicly, these "experts" also believe that the U.S. must make some concessions to entice the regime to engage in a dialogue.

Thermidore-type Policy

Over the years, the advocates of this line have done their best to justify the regime's policies in their analyses, interviews and writings. Depending on the circumstances, they have also advocated compromise with the clerics as a fact of life. Thus, many in the U.S. describe them as "apologists."

In the mid-1980s, the pro-compromise faction felt that Iran was on the verge of victory in the Iran-Iraq War. Therefore, they said, the U.S. must accept the reality of the Khomeini regime. The message is appeasement. In a 1986 article, "How Iran is becoming the Gulf Superpower," Gary Sick, a well-known proponent of this line, referred to the regime's advances in the war and the possibility of victory and establishment of an Islamic government in Iraq:

This scenario seems farfetched only because it has not happened-yet. But this script is a description of the basic elements of a plan that Iran's revolutionary leaders have been pursuing with conscious determination and considerable success-over the past year. If we are surprised again by Iran, as we have been in the past, we have only ourselves to blame.

Iran's recent successes were the result of conscious decisions taken to reverse policies that had brought it to a costly dead-end in its war with Iraq. The brilliant feat of arms, which bore comparison with Anwar Sadat's surprise attack across the Suez Canal, was no fluke. It demonstrated convincingly that the Iranian leadership was no longer motivated solely by religious fervor...

On the basis of the recent performance, one can only conclude that Iran's military will be a force to be dealt with in the region for some time to come. The same conclusion applies to the political leadership. Iran's theocratic political structure is unique, even bizarre by Western standards. Still, it has shown a remarkable ability to manage chaos and to protect its interests effectively when its survival is at stake.⁴⁴

The apologists have lost no opportunity to identify signals for positive change in the regime's policies. In a 1987 article in *Foreign*

Affairs, Gary Sick wrote:

Initially, Iran proclaimed its foreign policy in absolute, exclusionary terms in which Iran's role was to serve as the exemplar and catalyst to bring "Islam to the entire world." The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the foreign service were purged repeatedly, and representatives abroad were exhorted to abjure traditional diplomacy in favor of revolutionary and doctrinal purity. Implicit in this approach was the assumption that the world was corrupt and, in the end, the world needed Iran more than Iran needed the world. After four years of war, that assumption was wearing thin. In October 1984, Khomeini summoned Iran's diplomatic representatives from abroad and instructed them to take a new approach. "We should act as it was done in early Islam when the Prophet... send ambassadors to all parts of the world to establish proper relations. We cannot sit idly by saying we have nothing to do with the governments. This is contrary to intellect and religious law. We should have relations with all governments with the exception of a few with which we have no relations at present... We will not establish relations with America unless America behaves properly."

These pronouncements marked a fundamental shift, not in Tehran's foreign policy goals but in its strategy for pursuing those goals. Khomeini and his lieutenants had discovered that a policy of unrelenting hostility and pressure was getting nowhere, and, more important, hampering Iran's ability to sustain itself at home, while fighting a total war...

These announcements in late 1984, were followed by a series of missions by key Iranian political figures to dozens of countries throughout the world. The message of these emissaries in each case was that Iran posed no military or subversive threat to its neighbors, that the war with Iraq was imposed on Iran by Saddam Hussein's aggression, that Iran had no territorial designs on Iraq or any other nation in the Persian Gulf region, and that Iran desires normal political and trade relations with all countries of the world...

By mid-1986, Khomeini was able to assert: "There was a time when the situation was chaotic and everything was in ruins, but—thank God—everything is now proper and right... domestic and international affairs are put right..."

Iran has proved adept in the practice of "thump and talk" diplomacy, lashing out with what appears to be utter fearlessness and abandon at enemies of all sizes while simultaneously discussing agreements and concessions. Its reputation as a "crazy state" is deserved but it is often not as crazy as it seems...

It is apparent that Iran has modified, at least for the time being, its millenarian goal of bringing "Islam to the entire world" in favor of a policy that might be described as "clericalism in one country..."

Perhaps because of the high price it paid for the original hostage crisis, Iran now attempts to avoid direct association with terrorism. Its deputy prime minister has declared (with a straight face) that it is "against hostage taking which is also rejected by Islam" and that it will "take any measures in its powers wherever in the world" to oppose the taking of hostages.⁴⁵

Mr. Sick's commentary was published while a score of American and British nationals were being held by the regime's agents in South Lebanon. At the same time, he described the regime as a victim of the Mojahedin's terrorism.

In 1988, Sick likened the Iranian situation to what was transpiring in the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ Advocating a policy of courting the mullahs more openly, he stressed that the United States must rid itself of the specter of the Iran-Contra affair that had cast a shadow over U.S. policy in the region.⁴⁷ Some time later, in a CNN interview, he lauded the U.S. government for holding secret talks with the regime's representatives.⁴⁸ In a subsequent interview with NBC television, he again expressed support for secret talks with the mullahs, saying that the Iranians really wanted to change their image.⁴⁹

Shortly after the State Department report came out, Mr. Sick wrote, "Iran is ripe for a peaceful overture,"⁵⁰ reasoning: "Isolation of potential offenders, even when combined with a strict international ban on the sale of nuclear technology is not sufficient to solve the ultimate problem."⁵¹ Rejecting the policy of containment, he added that the Clinton Administration should name a senior representative to start talking, without preconditions, with Iran. Mr. Sick's candidate for the job was Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau, whose department prepared the report on the Mojahedin. Sick concluded that appointing a senior representative "would add a new seriousness of purpose to U.S. expressions of willingness to talk to Iran. Iran complains that its security concerns go unheeded by the West."⁵² In other words, the appointed contact to establish dialogue with the mullahs' would address Tehran's "security concerns." The mullahs have repeatedly and explicitly identified their primary concern, through diplomatic channels on the one hand and by torturing and executing even marginal supporters of the Resistance, assassinating Resistance's activists abroad, and bombing its bases. Officials in the U.S. and other countries are fully aware of this reality. Clearly, therefore, Mr. Sick's call for a dialogue with Tehran to address its security concerns can mean only one thing: That the U.S. attack the Mojahedin and National Council of Resistance, a primary "security concern" of the Iranian regime.

To promulgate such views, their authors must portray the regime as popular and conceal its atrocities. In 1988, Khomeini ordered an

extensive wave of political executions largely of Mojahedin members and sympathizers, described as unprecedented by international human rights organizations. His designated successor, Hossein Ali Montazeri, protested that the executions would not eliminate the Mojahedin, but only add to their popularity. Here is what James Bill had to say about the mass executions after a visit to Iran in early 1989. Asserting that the "great majority of the Iranian people support" the regime, he added:

When the most recent cycle mercifully stops spinning, the period of revolutionary extreme terror should be complete. With the war apparently over and the overwhelming majority of the Iranian people seeking peace and normalcy, there is hope that the 10th anniversary of the revolution will usher in a new era when the revolutionary pragmatists will take over the political controls of the state and when the builders, reconstructers, developers, and healers can move to the fore to ply their trades.⁵³

Six years later, Mr. Bill's visions of moderation and reconstruction in Iran are nowhere in sight. On the contrary, the mullahs have intensified the crackdown on internal dissent and stepped up international terrorism and export of fundamentalism, emerging as the main threat to peace and stability in the region. Yet, Mr. Bill insists on his views. In a piece for *Middle East Policy* in 1993, he offers a discourse on the regime's state and U.S. policy. In justifying the mullahs' atrocities, he portrays the Iranian regime's human rights violations, terrorism, weapons purchases and efforts to acquire nuclear technology as "myths," and therefore negligible. Like other supporters of compromise, he believes that the U.S. must take further steps in rapprochement with the Iranian regime, and questions even the nominal denunciations by the President and the Secretary of State. He writes:

The current U.S. policy of pressuring and publicly condemning Iran is based upon a series of predominant myths and misunderstandings... American policy makers are pursuing a counterproductive strategy. Internationally, Iran will respond in kind to U.S. pressure; within the Islamic Republic of Iran itself, this pressure will only strengthen the most extreme groups who continue to feed off the emotions and suffering that have followed in the path of the revolution and the long, devastating war with Iraq.

If U.S. policy and pressure are able to do serious economic and political harms to Iran, the result could be disastrous for the stability in the Persian Gulf... (A) prudent policy would first be based on a recognition of what is

myth and what is reality concerning Iran. Such policy would then involve toning down the rhetoric while practicing the patience befitting a great power. The United States should consider implementing a low-key dialogue while initiating a series of confidence building measures that would be apportioned to the Iranian response.⁵⁴

Another person introduced as an Iran expert at the end of the State Department report is Mehdi Noorbaksh, Ibrahim Yazdi's son-in-law. Mr. Noorbaksh has very close ties with the regime's ambassador to the United Nations, Kamal Kharrazi, who has given large sums of money to the Institute for Research in Islamic Studies (IRIS), which Noorbaksh heads. He criticizes U.S. policy for inattention to the "reformist" factions, which, he explains, is why the present regime has radicalized. He even blames this policy for the hostage crisis, arguing that even Khomeini was initially opposed to the U.S. Embassy takeover. Noorbaksh formulates his version of the proper U.S. policy on Iran in this way:

It has to be recognized that the process of transformation has not yet been completed. The revolution is not yet over. Iranian society is still in a post-revolutionary phase in which many questions must be answered and many problems resolved. Conflict aids only radicalism inside and postpones constructive debates on domestic and foreign policy.⁵⁵

Speaking of other, diverse factions in Iran, he concludes:

Awareness of this diversity helps the U.S. to overcome misunderstanding about Islam and the Muslim world and encourages positive engagement with Muslims and Iranians who within and outside the government are pushing for moderation.⁵⁶

The discredited saga of "moderates" is the crux of Mr. Noorbaksh's analysis. The ploy has been successfully used for years by the mullahs, with a little help from their friends, to forestall a firm policy. In their "impartial" assessments, however, Messrs. Noorbaksh and Bill overlook 15 years of U.S. efforts to lure the mullahs and realize the dream of "moderates." That policy was a dismal failure, only encouraging the mullahs to persist in their policies. Interestingly, both writers offer similar reasoning. More importantly, both express opposition to the Mojahedin.

Ervand Abrahamian, whose writings form the basis for the State Department report, explains this group's perspective in his most

recent book, *Khomeinism*. He writes that the word "fundamentalist" does not properly define Khomeini. The correct term is "populist": "If Khomeinism is a form of populism, it contains the potential for change and acceptance of modernity—even eventually of political pluralism, gender equality, individual rights and social democracy."⁵⁷ He adds: "My argument is that Khomeinism should be seen as a flexible political movement expressing social economic grievances, not simply as a religious crusade obsessed with scriptural texts, spiritual purity and theological dogma."⁵⁸ In the last chapter of his book, Mr. Abrahamian concludes: "As the radicals have been marginalized, Rafsanjani and Khamenei have implemented a full range of Thermidore-type policies; in the economy, in social matters, in judiciary, and in foreign affairs."⁵⁹ Several years after the book's publication, however, the consequences of these "Thermidore-type policies" have been but deteriorating economic conditions, escalating political and social suppression, growing public discontent at home and increasing involvement in terrorism abroad.

Eric Hooglund is another source of report. Lavish in his support for the mullahs of Iran, he has frequently traveled to that country in recent years, and is one of the most notorious proponents of an appeasement policy. He recently became Editor in Chief of *U.S.-Iran Review*, published in Washington by the mullahs' U.S. lobby, FAIR.

Dangerous Moderates

Patrick Clawson, an expert on Iranian affairs, rejects closer ties with the regime, noting: "'The moderates' may pose a greater threat than the 'radicals' to stability in the Gulf..."⁶⁰ In his book, *Iran's Challenge to the West: How, When and Why?* he writes: "Many arguments have been made against cultivating relations with Iranian moderates." Dismissing the policy of "bringing Iran to the family of nations," he states:

This policy of accommodation is based on the hypothesis that economic moderation—free-market policies, extensive trade and investment—will lead to foreign policy moderation. So far, there is little evidence to support this assumption. Indeed, it could be argued that additional resources have permitted Iran to accelerate its rearmament, to step up its pressure on Gulf states, and to meddle more in Middle Eastern policies from Lebanon to Algeria and Sudan—

the exact opposite of what Europe and Japan had hoped to accomplish through their policy of accommodation.⁶¹

Referring to congressional opposition and articles in the press highlighting "the risks of greater trade with Iran," he brands the policy as ineffective.

Citing the existing experiences, including the Iran-Contra affair, Mr. Clawson describes the policy of "carrot-and-stick" as unrealistic:

A carrot-and-stick policy contains dangers that need to be carefully considered. It is likely to turn out to be less effective than hoped, and, in any case, it might not be acceptable to the American people... There may well be no basis for a constructive relationship between the Islamic Republic and the U.S.... In this case, the best U.S. policy may be containment... Economic weaknesses and the growing disillusionment of the Iranian people with rampant corruption and continuing poverty increases the chance that a policy of containment would succeed... The reservoir of support for the clerics, once fed by the waters of hatred for the shah, has run dry.⁶²

Joshua Muravchik, a specialist in democracy, human rights and American foreign policy, sees the policy choice of "regime versus Mojahedin" in a larger context, in which the Mojahedin's inclination toward democracy is the key factor. Democracy, Muravchik believes,

may offer an answer to a terrible problem, the rise of Islamic "fundamentalism," that is fanatical, politicized and violent... It is also of special concern from the point of view of those who delight in the recent progress of democracy around the globe. With the collapse of the last of the great and terrible 20th century totalitarian ideological alternatives to democracy, the one remaining fierce opponent of democracy in the world is the force of Islamic fanaticism.⁶³

Reflecting on his discussions about democracy with the Mojahedin, Mr. Muravchik states:

The idea that it might be possible to stimulate the development of a democratic movement in Iran to challenge fanaticism right at its center intrigued me. For today, Tehran is to Islamic fanaticism what Moscow was to world communism.⁶⁴

After reviewing the State Department's allegations and offering possible explanations, he reasons:

If they [the Mojahedin] are not the good guys that they say, and I hope they are, we still have a hard-headed strategic reason to support them. The government of Iran is a very special threat and an enemy whose potential for damage spreads very far and wide...

There is also a less hard-headed reason for taking an interest in what the Mojahedin say. Let's suppose that the fears of their critics are well-founded, and they do not mean what they say about democracy. The fact that they are talking about democracy and not sloganeering, is still very important. They are talking about the values of religious tolerance and contested elections. They are talking about the values of tolerance as opposed to cruelty, which seems to be the fundamental issue. They are spreading this message among the Iranian people and in their part of the world. This is a very valuable message to have spread, whether the people who are spreading it are sincere or not. We have often seen that people start spreading a message and eventually they convince themselves. From this perspective, even the objection that they are insincere is not a decisive objection, because the Mojahedin say the right things about democracy, and I am eager to see people in this part of the world talking about democracy.⁶⁵

Fox's Tail

In its search for a way to package the baseless allegations against the Mojahedin, the State Department has referred to the views of a number of appeasement policy advocates. As the Persian saying goes: "They asked the fox, Who is your witness? He said, My tail."

In his book, *Khomeinism*, Ervand Abrahamian explains that during the Mossadeq era, the shah's regime tried, with the direct assistance of governments supporting it, to rewrite history:

Some Western academics did their best to expurgate from their publications any mention of the CIA and MI6 in the 1953 coup. In fact, recent autobiographies reveal that the shah often subsidized British and American academics whose publications tended to reinforce the court view of modern Iranian history, especially of the 1953 events.⁶⁶

The mullahs' regime has pursued the same *modus operandi*, promoting its views through third parties and spending millions of dollars on lobby groups, such as FAIR. There is a significant difference, however: In light of the irremediable crises plaguing them, before seeking to distort history, the mullahs must first try to cover up the present: Their atrocities at home and their international isolation abroad.

