Is Iran on the Brink of Another Revolution?

Institute of World Politics

September 23, 2010

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Last year when the Green Movement started, many looked at it with doubt. We, who have fought for freedom all our lives look at it as a revolution. Most scholars and so-called Iran experts and Islamic Republic lobbyists insisted that it was a civil rights movement. There were those exceptional few among scholars and policy makers in Washington who understood that this movement was much more profound than what the IR lobbyists portrayed it to be. I am very proud to be sitting next to one of these insightful and brilliant individuals, Ken Katzman.

I would like to state my opinion clearly here. The Green Movement is unquestionably a revolution and the beginning of the end of the Islamic Republic. I know that Americans are not strangers to revolution. One can say that they have experienced the most successful revolution in history and they succeeded to feel their revolution, and pass on its values from generation to generation. Iranians too are not unfamiliar with revolution. 104 years ago, Iranians were the first nation in the East to establish a parliamentary system during the Constitutional Revolution. Thirty one years ago, Iranians formed another revolution that was a new phenomenon in the modern world. We Iranians are very capable of surprising the world.

In the interim, other events have taken place that have been nothing less than a revolution such as nationalizing oil in September 1951, reform movement, student uprisings and the greatest of them all: the green movement, that in many respects is bigger than a revolution. The Green Movement started with the presence of over four million Iranians in a peaceful protest in Tehran. These numbers are quoted from the regime's news agencies and it was the biggest protest in Iranian history.

I said all of this to demonstrate that Iranians are familiar with revolution and are not afraid of it. Let us take a quick look at the population of Iran. Iran has one of the youngest populations in the world with an estimated 70% under the age of 35. Pay attention to the fact that this generation has the experience of a revolution, a devastating eight year war, eight years of reforms. Governmental brainwashing throughout their school years, the liberating experience of wandering through the cyber world and the experience of the mad and radical government of Ahmadinejad. A nation has to live for hundreds of years to gain this collection of experiences and in Iran, the majority of the population has it with under 35 years of age. This is the reason why the behavior of the new generation of Iran is filled with brightness, talent, practicality, maturity, courage, modernity and confidence. We cannot see this in the old Iranian opposition.

A quick look at the developments in the past year and a half, and the brilliant moves of this new generation proves this point. On the other hand, this generation doesn't have anything to lose. A cruel dictatorship that seemed frightening until last year has taken everything away from them. They are not allowed to wear what they want, to eat what they want, to pick the major that they want in school, to fall in love, to go to parties or out with their friends without risking being arrested, to find the job that they like, to be happy, to listen to the music that they like, or to even have free access to the internet. They do not even have the option of escaping this suffocating environment. I can safely say that today every Iranian family has one political case in the Revolutionary courts. Some families such as mine have one for every member of the family. Iran has practically become a huge prison for 74 million Iranians. Last week my mother, three of my sister and my nephew who had a visa and a passport were dragged out of the airplane, arrested and taken to the revolutionary court. They were
told that they could not leave the country because of their relation to me. This smart and brave generation doesn't have much to lose but they have a lot to fight for- life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

With the crimes that they have witnessed in the past thirty one years, they have not only turned away from the Islamic Republic, but also from Shiism and even Islam. But they still love their own God. The new generation in Iran knows very well what it does not want. It knows that it does not want the governance of fanatic mullahs under the name of the Islamic Republic. They are eagerly searching for an alternative and the ways to achieve it.

From all of this we can conclude that there are enough incentives and a real possibility for a revolution in Iran. A revision of different theories and viewpoints on the history of revolutions can be summarized into four factors that lead to a revolution.

The first is deep dissatisfaction with the current situation, seeing no prospects for reforms and widespread anger. In the past year and a half dissatisfaction has intensified among the Iranian people and the violent crackdown of the peaceful protests has led to a mass hatred of the government and all those in power, especially the supreme leader. The collapse of the forces loyal to the dictatorship of the supreme leader

The second is the appearance of new ideas. The Green Movement belongs to a new generation that has no kinship with its traditional predecessors. With the help of the new media and technology, the young Iranians are spreading the idea of green secularism against the dominant religious ideology.

The third factor is breaking barriers. The best example is the courageous young Iranians fighting back the police forces and shouting "death to the dictator" and "death to Khamenei" behind the walls of Khamenei's palace. The mere utterance of Khamenei's name used to be taboo. This new found confidence is the result of the loss of legitimacy of the regime within and outside of Iran's borders. Even the global community has gained more confidence and is taking bolder steps in confronting the Islamic Republic because it has witnessed a powerful movement that they can count on. International sanctions and political isolation have aggravated the already bleak economic situation in Iran. The gradual collapse of the forces loyal to the dictatorship of the supreme leader continues almost daily. The leadership of the Islamic Republic is angry, depressed and has lost control of the situation. This can clearly be seen in their speeches, the positions they take and in their behavior.

The last factor is leadership and symbols. The Green Movement's leadership cannot be summarized in one person or even several people. It is common wisdom shared by a whole generation that is now trying to build the foundation for a leadership for the transition period. The lawyers of the Green Movement have drafted a new constitution for a modern, secular and democratic Iran. A symbol like Neda that is accepted by all political parties will help them converge during this transition.

Maybe it is difficult for some to believe that this is a revolution, but they will not lose much by looking at it as a serious possibility instead of being caught by surprise like all scholars and policy makers were in 1979 with the Islamic Revolution when no one had prepared for it and the political landscape lost its equilibrium. More than anyone the United States was the biggest loser and lost its best friend and ally in the region by ignoring the facts and heeding to the so called Iran scholars such as Seyd Hossein Nasr. Now his son whose advisory skills are a parody of his father’s is trying to convince the current administration that the Green Movement is nothing more than a civil rights movement.

But mark my words. This is a revolution. A green revolution.

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