



# National Iranian American Council

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## IRAN'S AWAKENING

Events of the last few months in Iran indicate that her dark days are numbered. On December 27th, on the occasion of Ashura, the most holy day of Islam's Shiite branch, hundreds of thousands of Iranians poured onto the streets of major Iranian cities. Crowds angry at the regime buttressed the ranks of mourners commemorating the death of Prophet Mohammad's grandson. Seeking the safety, and the sanctity, of the occasion, they had come out to vent against the tyranny of a morally corrupt regime bent on its own survival at all costs. However, the regime was prepared to squelch the protesters, and YouTube is now littered with graphic videos of the mayhem that followed. These amount to what can be considered an allegory of the death of the regime in Tehran. They document gruesome killings

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of the young protesters, and the indiscriminate beating of women, men, young and old in the hands of Khamenei's police and Basij forces. No government that is capable of brutalizing its own citizens, with this degree of viciousness, has much of a chance to survive. The Islamic regime's cardinal sin, however, was to do so on the most holy of its holy days. If history is any indication, many nasty

surprises await the perpetrators of this bloodshed.

To be sure, no matter how fanciful of a dream for some, Khamenei's military dictatorship is not about to collapse tomorrow. But, it is doing its own very best to accomplish this. At this juncture, the US and the Western powers have the moral obligation to not short-circuit this process. Anything that would provide Khamenei, and his entourage, the pretext of an "external threat" will do that, and should be avoided at all costs.

Most students of Iran's modern history are in agreement that it was Saddam's invasion in 1980, and the ensuing eight-year war, that entrenched the regime and empowered its Revolutionary Guards. "External threat" provided



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them the opportunity to assume powers to govern every facet of life in Iran. Following the war, the "regime change" rhetoric enabled this ruling elite to tighten its grip further, and Western sanctions strengthened the Guard's financial muscle. With their survival and prosperity dependent on it, the Guards chose a demagogue who could best keep the threat of external threat alive. The fix was in, and a heretofore unknown Ahmadinejad was anointed as the winner of the 2005 presidential race. All went well for them until Obama changed Washington's rhetoric. Out was regime change, and in the stretched hand of friendship. Unprepared, the regime was thrown off balance. With the heretofore silenced moderates coming out of the woodwork, the regime's elite saw existential threat in an election defeat for Ahmadinejad. A second fix was in, and a second term for a man otherwise destined for a landslide defeat. The regime's vicious handling of those peacefully protesting the engineered outcome of the elections convinced large segments of the population that they now face a real "internal threat" from their own government.

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Therefore, what was unthinkable, just a year ago, is now taking place right in front of our eyes: large crowds directly questioning the legitimacy of the regime. Constantly looking for the next excuse, and more determined everyday, the crowds keep coming out.

The regime's brutal treatment of its citizens is, indeed, repulsive. Further, its brazen disregard for the will of the international community adds fuel to fodder. However, in its efforts to punish the thuggish regime in Tehran, the West has to keep in mind that the "do nothing" alternative is always an option, and sometimes the

best. Sanctions, not clearly targeted, will throw the regime a new lifeline and the Revolutionary Guards a new source of lucrative revenue. Further, the regime is desperately searching for that "external threat" that could once again shore up its legitimacy. Some forms of sanctions (including the ban on the import of refined petroleum) may carry such an unintended consequence, as will military strikes. As long as the Western world does not provide it a new lifeline, the Iranian regime will do just fine putting itself out of its own misery. Clear, strong, and consistent expressions of support for the universal rights of the Iranian people are much more likely to succeed.

Thirty years after the revolution of 1979, the dawn has never looked closer for the Iranians. President Obama's gestures to the Iranian people shook the oppressors to their cores, and gave the oppressed the hope and the promise of daylight. For most Iranians, daybreak is within reach.

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