WESTERNIZATION OR MODERNIZATION: THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND DESIRES OF THE POST-KHOMEINI GENERATION IN IRAN

by

MAJ J. Jay Updegraff

USAF

School of Advanced Military Studies

United States Army Command and General Staff College

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

AY 05-06

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				*Form Approved* *OMS No. 0704-0188*

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions. searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense. Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that not withstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)*	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)*
25-05-2006	**MONOGRAPH**	**SEPT 2005-MAR 2006**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
WESTERNIZATION OR MODERNIZATION: THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND DESIRES OF THE POST-KHOMEINI GENERATION IN IRAN	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S) MAJ JERRY J. UPDEGRAFF	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
School of Advanced Military Studies 250 Gibbon Ave Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027	

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
Command and General Staff College 1 Reynolds Ave Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027	CGSC, SAMS
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
Does the generation of Iranians born after the 1979 revolution wish to continue living under the system established by Ayatollah Khomeini, or do they wish to modernize (or perhaps westernize) their current political, social, and economic systems? Research for this paper to consisted of published material, including Internet sources and Iranian Web log sites, all written in English. This paper uses three broad frameworks to examine the attitudes and desires of the post-Khomeini generation in Iran. The three frameworks used are political, economic and social policies. Attitude defines how the young Iranians feel and desire describes what the young Iranians want. Iran's history, its political structure and the importance of the clerical class in Iran are also examined as background information, necessary to critically examine the issue of attitudes and desires. This paper has four major conclusions. The first is that young Iranians have subordinated their immediate desire for political change for changes in the economic and social policies of Iran. The second conclusion is that any eventual change in the Iranian political system will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. The third conclusion is that the United States government has little ability to directly influence the attitudes and desires of these young Iranians directly. However, the last conclusion proposes that the United States government can effectively influence these groups indirectly, through the use of three identified leverage points. The leverage points fall into the general groupings of media, economics, and education.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
IRAN, POST-KHOMEINI GENERATION, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, ATTITUDES AND DESIRES

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17 LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
REPORT **(U)**	b. ABSTRACT **(U)**	c. THIS PAGE **(U)**	**(U)**	56	19B. TELEPHONE. NUMBER *(Include area code)* (913) 758-3300

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8/98)

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES

MONOGRAPH APPROVAL

MAJ J. JAY UPDEGRAFF

Title of Monograph: WESTERNIZATION OR MODERNIZATION: THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND DESIRES OF THE POST-KHOMEINI GENERATION IN IRAN

Approved by:

_____   Monograph Director
David Burbach, Ph.D.

_____   Director,
Kevin C.M. Benson, COL, AR   School of Advanced
Military Studies

_____   Director,
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.   Graduate Degree
Programs

Abstract

WESTERNIZATION OR MODERNIZATION: THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND DESIRES OF THE POST-KHOMEININI GENERATION IN IRAN, by MAJ J. JAY UPDEGRAFF,USAF, 56 pages

The purpose of this paper is to answer the following question: Does the generation of Iranians born after the 1979 revolution wish to continue living under the system established by Ayatollah Khomeini, or do they wish to modernize (or perhaps westernize) their current political, social, and economic systems? This group is significant because 70% of the population of Iran is under the age of 30, and an amazing 50% is under the age of 21.

Research for this paper to consisted of published material, including Internet sources and Iranian Web log sites, all written in English. This paper uses three broad frameworks to examine the attitudes and desires of the post-Khomeini generation in Iran. The three frameworks used are political, economic and social policies. To distinguish between attitudes and desires, the following definitions are used. Attitude defines how the young Iranians feel and desire describes what the young Iranians want. Iran's history, its political structure and the importance of the clerical class in Iran are also examined as background information, necessary to critically examine the issue of attitudes and desires.

This paper has four major conclusions. The first is that young Iranians have subordinated their immediate desire for political change for changes in the economic and social policies of Iran. The second conclusion is that any eventual change in the Iranian political system will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. The third conclusion is that the United States government has little ability to directly influence the attitudes and desires of these young Iranians directly. However, the last conclusion proposes that the United States government can effectively influence these groups *indirectly*, through the use of three identified leverage points.

The leverage points fall into the general groupings of media, economics, and education. Finally, the paper assesses as low the probability that the under-30 generation in Iran will attempt to effect political change in the near term.

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INTRODUCTION

"Iran is an inherently problematic country."[1]   With this simple statement, author

Kenneth Pollack tries to sum up the complexity of one of the nations President George Bush has

described as part of an axis of evil. Why is Iran so problematic, and in what ways is its

relationship to the United States complex? This paper will address one component of this

complex problem. That component is the growing tension between the current conservative

government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and its expanding youth population. Specifically,

this paper will attempt to answer the following key question: Does the generation of Iranians

born after the 1979 wish to continue living under the system established by Ayatollah Khomeini,

or do they wish to modernize (or perhaps westernize) their current political, social, and economic

systems?

In the twenty-six years since the overthrow of the Shah, Iran has lived under an Islamic

Revolutionary government hostile to the West and arguably resistant to modernization.

Globalization of the world economy, as well as the proliferation of the Internet as a source of

information has given Iranians under the age of 30 an exposure to western ideas of politics,

economics, and culture that seem to clash with the current systems in Iran. This paper will

attempt to define what the current attitudes of this "under 30" demographic in Iran are toward the

West in general, and the United States specifically, and what the desires are for their future.

Furthermore, this paper will examine what steps this age group may take to assert their desires

and what the reaction of the current government might be to such a challenge. The paper will

also attempt to determine if there is a compromise position agreeable to both sides.

Why is this question of Iranian youth desires relevant? The question is relevant because

Iran is currently viewed as the "next" trouble spot in the Middle East. A potential conflict

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[1] Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, (New York: Random House, 2004), 302.

between the younger generation in Iran and the current generation in power could serve as a source of instability in the country. Given Iran's geo-strategic location between Iraq and Afghanistan, instability in Iran would threaten the United States' efforts to establish democratic governments in both these neighboring states. Also, given the looming prospect of an Iran equipped with nuclear weapons, an unstable Iran is not in the best interests of the United States.

The effect on Iraq is obvious. With a majority Shia population in Iraq, Iran now exerts enormous influence over the country. Two examples prove this point. According to a Congressional Research Service Report released in July, 2005 the government of Iran extended a line of credit worth $1 billion to Iraq.[2] Also, in the January 2005 Iraqi National Assembly elections, a Shia party (The United Iraqi Alliance) won 140 of 275 seats in the Assembly. Among this 140 seat bloc were all of Iran's proxies in Iraq.[3] Instability in Iran would certainly bleed over into Iraq.

Afghanistan is also at risk from an unstable Iran because of the significant Shia minorities and Farsi speaking tribes along its western border. It was the suppression of these minorities that led Iran to assist the United States in the removal of the Sunni-dominated Taliban regime from Afghanistan. Another reason the youth desires are relevant is because they could serve as a catalyst for improved relations with the West, and perhaps an opportunity for the United States to gain access and influence in Iran. For the three reasons listed above, it is important for military planners and strategists to understand the mindset of this large and growing segment of Iranian society, and how the current Iranian government plans to deal with the first generation of Iranians born under the Islamic Revolution banner.

In order to understand the complexity of the situation in Iran, and determine the attitudes and desires of the youth generation in Iran, the following framework will be used. As with any

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[2] Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses", CRS Report for Congress, 22 July, 2005, 18.
[3] Ibid., 18.

study of a foreign country, a basic description of its history is both useful and relevant. The

historical background for this monograph will focus on three broad areas of Iranian history; the

age of Arab influence, post-World War I until the fall of the Shah, and the 1979 Islamic

revolution. A basic knowledge of Iranian history is required to understand the importance of the

Islamic revolution and the importance it plays in everyday Iranian life. Knowledge of recent

Iranian history also helps the reader to understand the current government reactions to the reform

movement.

After briefly examining the history of Iran, this paper will describe the current Iranian

political system, with an emphasis on the important role Shia clerics play in what can rightfully

be called history's first Islamic theocracy. This section of the paper will also explain why clerics

hold such an important position in the Shia practice of Islam. The role of current leaders, the

Iranian Majlis (parliament) and the influence of the reform movement on the Iranian political

structure will also be discussed.

The next section of the monograph will be a thorough exploration of the attitudes and

desires of the youth generation in Iran. For the purposes of this paper, the youth generation will

be defined as those Iranians under the age of 30. This group is statistically significant because it

is widely accepted that 70% of the population is under 30 years old, and an amazing 50% is under

the age of 21.[4]

How will this monograph determine the attitudes and desires of this group?   In an

attempt to gain an accurate picture of what the youth generation in Iran values, and their openness

to westernization and modernization, data will be examined on the consumption of western

sources of news and media. Things like satellite TV dish and cell phone usage, as well as Internet

Service Provider data could show an affinity for more liberal social conditions by the under-30

age group. Additionally, Web logs, or blogs as they are more commonly referred to, are an

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[4] Afshin Molavi, *Persian Pilgrimages*, (New York: Norton, 2002), 35.

important and growing source of expression for those dissatisfied with the current situation in Iran. The results of examining some of these blogs will be discussed. Also, immigration data documenting the number of young people seeking to leave Iran legally, as well as the number who seek work or student visas for travel abroad could be viewed as a measure of the dissatisfaction with the current regime. Preliminary research has discovered that 1 in 4 college-educated Iranians work abroad and 200,000 Iranians emigrated legally in 2001.[5] A discussion of these trends would help to contribute to an overall picture of the social and political climate in Iran. Finally, recent journal articles (preferably those written by Iranians or Iranian expatriates) will be examined in an attempt to gain insight on what the current issues between the government of Iran and the reform movement are, as well as the youth response to recent reform movement setbacks. Although public opinion polls would also serve as an excellent source of information on the attitudes and desires of young Iranians, the author of this paper was unable to find any such surveys published in English. The fact that Iran does not have a free press, and the likelihood of government scrutiny of any organization wishing to take an opinion poll that might damage the image of the government is one possible reason for the lack of published opinion poll data.

After drawing conclusions about the attitudes and desires of Iranian youth toward the West and the United States, potential government reactions to demands for a change in the social, political or economic structure by Iran's younger generation will be examined. This is important because the current Iranian government is caught in a dilemma. It can ignore the youth desires and risk disaffecting a large portion of the population. This could result in creating internal political and social problems, or it can it can make concessions to these groups which might weaken the Islamic Republic's stranglehold on Iran's political, economic and social systems.

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[5] Molavi, 17.

To provide a lens through which to view these potential future government reactions, several historical examples of past government reactions to movements for change will be discussed. Using the analysis from these historical precedents, some hypothetical situations will be considered and attempts made to predict government reactions to future scenarios.

Given the volatility of a potential clash between younger Iranians and the government, it is not inconceivable that some middle ground for compromise might be found. The next section of the monograph will explore this potential middle ground, and try to analyze what agreements between the government and Iranian youth groups might be realistic. Such agreements could afford Iranian youth the change they may want, and yet assure the government of Iran that it is still in full control of the country, while avoiding a compromise of the ideals of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Finally, this monograph will conclude by identifying potential leverage points caused by the apparent rift between Iran's younger generation and the government. Of particular interest are those leverage points the United States military or government may take advantage of in its dealings with Iran. Also, an attempt will be made to asses the probability of future conflict between the government of Iran and this younger generation, and when such a conflict may occur.

Summarizing the findings of this study, this author concludes that the youth generation in Iran is more focused on economic and social, rather than political change. Furthermore, any change in Iran's government will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Additionally the United States will have difficulty influencing the under-30 generation in Iran directly, but has an immense ability to influence them indirectly through the use of media, economics and education. Finally, the probability of conflict between the younger generation in Iran and the government is low. Answering the thesis question "Do Iranians under the age of 30 wish to continue living under the present conditions in Iran, or do they desire to modernize (or westernize) their current

political, economic and social systems?" yields an affirmative answer to changing all three system, but in a specific priority and time frame for the three systems discussed.

One note to the reader before continuing is warranted. All the research performed for this monograph was conducted in English, and the reader must understand that the author will attempt to make generalizations and draw conclusions about an entire age group from this English language data set.

HISTORY

A basic knowledge and comprehension of the history of Iran is crucial to understanding the complex, and often-times contradictory nature of Iran and its social and political systems. This paper is ultimately about culture, and to understand a nation's culture you must understand its history. There are six key lessons the reader should take from this section: 1) foreign influence in Iran is a common occurrence in Iranian history 2) Iran's people have a history of integration, rather than subjugation by conquerors 3) the spread of Islam is the defining event in the history of Iran 4) the dominance of the Shia branch of Islam is the second most important historical event in Iran 5) "modern" Iran was caught between Great Power struggles for dominance 6) the current Iranian regime has viewed the United States as Iran's main adversary since the end of World War II.

It should be noted that historians traditionally differentiate between the notion of Persia and Iran as a political state. This difference is important from a historical perspective, but for the sake of consistency this section of the paper will also use the term Iran for the political entity more historically and properly known as Persia.

Pre-Islamic History

The Achaemenidi Era (550-330 B.C.) is considered Iran's beginning as an empire. In 539 B.C. Cyrus captured Babylon, and began to extend his empire to the east. By 529 B.C. the

empire extended across present-day Iran and into Afghanistan.[6]   The Achaemenidi Empire began to decline after the death of Darius the Great in 486 B.C. and by 324 B.C. Alexander the Great and his armies had swept in from Macedonia and taken control of the region. But rather than subjugate the people of Iran, Alexander attempted to integrate Iranian culture into existing Greek culture. The most famous symbol of this attempt at integration was the mass marriage of 10,000 Macedonian warriors to Iranian brides at the city of Susa.[7]

The next true Iranian Empire occurred in the period 224-642 when the Sassanids came to power. During this time period the Sassanids attempted to shift the culture of Iran away from Greek influence and back to its Iranian roots.   The importance of this period of Iranian history is that Rome replaced Greece as the main foreign threat to Iranian interests.   After struggling against Rome, Iran was then was forced to battle against the Byzantine Empire. These two struggles lasted for almost 400 year and left the Iranian Empire weak and vulnerable to its next foreign invasion.

Islamic Invasion

The defining moment of Iranian history is the Islamic conquest of Iran. This event, which took almost 30 years to complete, was to have far-reaching political, economic and social ramifications for the rest of Iran's history. The Islamic conquest of Iran began in 635 when the first caliph, Abu Bakr captured Baghdad, and turned his attention east. By 637 Islamic forces had captured the Sassanid capital city, and by 650 all Iranian resistance to the invasion had ended. The Iranians initially benefited from the tolerance of Islam to other religions. Conversion was rapid among the population that lived in cities, but those living in rural areas were slower to adopt Islam. It wasn't until the ninth century that Islam became the majority religion of Iran.[8]

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[6] Helen Metz, *Iran: A Country Study*, (Washington: Department of the Army, 1987), 6.
[7] Ibid., 9.
[8] Garry Lyle*, Iran: Modern World Nations*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1999), 47.

The Islamic invasion again presented an opportunity for Iran's culture to be assimilated rather than subjugated by a victorious power. Iranian systems of coinage, local governmental administration, and the ministerial class were all eagerly adopted by the Islamic conquerors.[9] Iranian contributions to Islamic art, science and medicine all helped contribute to a belief held by Iranians that Islam benefited more from Iranian integration than Iran benefited from Islamic rule. This "superiority complex" still exists today, and helps to explain some of the enmity between Iranians and Arabs.

After the Islamic invasion, the Ummayyads initially controlled Iran until they were overthrown by another Arab dynasty, the Abbasids. Various Mongol invasions from 1200-1500 devastated the political, economic and social structure of Iran. Eventually, an Iranian dynasty, the Safavids came to power in 1501. The Safavids were militant believers in the mystical Sufi sect of Shia Islam, and began to impose the Shia sect of Islam on all Iranians. Unlike the original Islamic invasion of the Ummayads in the 600s which allowed a gradual and voluntary conversion to Islam, the Safavid conversion to Shia Islam was compulsory. Understanding the historical rift between the Shia and the Sunni Muslims helps one understand today's friction between Iran and its neighboring states.

Sunni-Shia Split

The whole issue of the Sunni-Shia split revolves around the notion of succession. Who was the rightful heir to the prophet Mohammad? After Mohammad died in 632 there was a difference in opinion over whether the Islamic community should select the new caliph, or if familial linage should take precedent. The matter was further complicated by the fact that Mohammad had no male heir. Those supporting the community selection of the next caliph chose Abu Bakr, Mohammad's father in-law to be the next successor. Those who advocated the ancestral method believed Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law, should become the new leader of Islam.

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[9] Metz, 11.

The community selection advocates eventually won out, and Abu Bakr was chosen as caliph. Eventually however, Ali was named the fourth caliph, after the third caliph Othman was murdered in 656. When Ali assumed the role of caliph, a cousin of the murdered Othman, named Mu'awiya plotted against Ali, (believing him involved in Othman's death) and eventually killed Ali in Kufa, Iraq, in 661. Ali was entombed in Najaf, Iraq and the shrine at Najaf is regarded as the Shia sect's holiest site.[10]

Having taken back the caliphate, Mu'awiya consolidated his power. In 680 Mu'awiya died and was succeeded by his son Yazid. Ali's second son Husayn attempted to challenge this succession, believing his older brother Hasan, or himself should be the true caliph. The issue was decided at the Battle of Karbala in 680, where Yazid's army destroyed the much smaller forces of Husayn, leaving no survivors.[11] Husayn is entombed in a holy shrine in Karbala, Iraq.

An important belief in Shia theology is that Ali was the first of twelve imams, or leaders. Ali's sons Hasan and Husayn were the next two imams, followed by nine other blood descendants of Ali. Essential to Shia belief is the notion that the twelfth imam went onto hiding and will one day reappear, as the *Mahdi*.

Age of European Influence

Returning to the discussion of the Safavid Empire, it was during their reign that Iran had its first conflicts with European powers. In 1602 Shah Abbas expelled the Portuguese from the island of Bahrain, and allied himself with Britain to accomplish the same task with Portuguese forces in Hormoz.[12] The Safavid Dynasty eventually fell into chaos (1750-1795) and Iran had no strong governing body until Mohammad Qajar seized power at the turn of the 19th century.

It was during the Qajar rule that Iran truly began to feel the influence of the European powers. Iran engaged in two wars with Russia at tremendous cost both physically and

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[10] Pollack, 11.
[11] Molavi, 64-65.
[12] Metz, 19.

economically. At the conclusion of these wars in 1826, Iran had lost all of its territory north of

the Aras River, and was forced to make economic reparations to Russia. This defeat humiliated

the leaders of Iran and further reinforced the bitterness toward foreigner powers meddling in

Iranian affairs.

At the same time the Iranians were dealing with the Russians in the north, the British

were attempting to influence events in the south of Iran. On two occasions Britain landed troops

in the region to protect its interests and in 1857 Iran was forced to renounce all claims to any

territory in present-day Afghanistan and concede them to Britain.[13]

Prior to World War I, events in Europe began to unfold that were to have a dramatic

effect on Iranian affairs. Fearful of Germany's rise to power in Europe, Britain and Russia signed

the Anglo-Russian Agreement in 1907.[14] Included in this agreement was a plan to divide Iran

into three zones. The northern zone would be within Russia's sphere of influence. The British

would retain the southern zone and a small middle zone would be would serve as a neutral buffer

between the two powers.   Once again, the Iranian people were faced with the prospect of

European powers controlling their fate.

World War I had devastating consequences for Iran. Officially declaring neutrality, Iran

hoped to avoid being dragged into the conflict. However, many Iranians were sympathetic to

Germany if for no other reason than Germany was opposing Britain and Russia, the two great

powers that traditionally interfered in Iranian affairs.   Wanting to leave nothing to chance, and

acknowledging the danger from Turkey, (a German ally) both Britain and Russia deployed forces

to Iran. As Ken Pollack relates in his book *The Persian Puzzle*, one of the key factors in

influencing the British decision to send troops into Iran was the discovery of oil. In 1911 the

decision was made to convert the British navy from coal to oil power. The British felt so strongly

about the need to secure Iranian oil that during the war they agreed to a secret deal with Russia, in

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[13] Ibid., 21.
[14] www.wikipedia.org, "Qajar Dynasty," 14 March, 2006.

which the Russians would get control of the Bosporus Straights and Istanbul in return for British control over the neutral "slice" of Iran, hence guaranteeing Britain access to the newly discovered oil deposits.[15]   Several engagements between Turkish and Russian troops occurred in Iran, particularly in the Azerbaijan region, and British troops later launched attacks against Russian communist forces from northern Iran, once the Russian Revolution occurred. As a result of the Russian Revolution, and the allied victory of World War I, Iran found itself in virtual protectorate status under the British flag. This reality was formalized by the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919, which gave Britain virtually free reign to do as it pleased in Iran. Foreign domination of Iran for almost 100 years left a psychological scar on Iran's political consciousness. Author Pollack echoes this sentiment when he states, "This long century of weakness and dominance by foreign machinations had a traumatic impact on Iranian political culture and has reverberated throughout Iranian history to this day."[16]

"Modern" Iran

What is generally viewed as "modern Iranian history" began in 1921. Following the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919, Britain quickly decided that the cost of maintaining an armed force in Iran was too high and withdrew most of its military forces. This created a power vacuum, which was promptly filled by a Persian Cossack Brigade officer named Reza Khan. Initially Khan was named Minister of Defense and a civilian Prime Minister installed. However, Khan quickly established his political authority and within two years rose to the position of Prime Minister. He then forced Shah Ahmad into exile in Europe.[17]   In December, 1925 Khan succeeded in having the Majlis name him Shah. It is important to note that one of the four

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[15] Pollack, 24.
[16] Ibid., 26.
[17] www.wikipedia.org, "Reza Shah," 14 March, 2006.

members of the Majlis who opposed naming Reza Khan Shah was Mohammad Mossadeq, who would play an important role in future Iranian—U.S. relations.[18]

Reza Khan set out to chart an independent foreign policy for Iran, much to the concern of Britain and the Soviet Union. His biggest transgression, as far as Britain and the Soviets were concerned, was the relationship fostered between Iran and Nazi Germany. During the 1920's and 1930's Iran sent many of its military officers to Germany to study. Additionally, economic ties between the two countries grew. In fact, on the eve of World War II, Iran was Germany's leading trade partner.[19]

This relationship was too much for both the Soviet Union and Britain to accept. By 1941 there were thousands of German advisors, diplomats, and businessmen in Iran. Shortly after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, both Britain and the Soviets demanded Iran expel all German diplomats and military personnel from the country. Claiming that Iran had declared itself neutral and a non-belligerent country, Reza Khan refused this request. Prompt action by the allies followed. The British and Soviets launched a simultaneous invasion of the country in August, 1941 seizing the critical north-south Trans-Iranian railway and Iranian port facilities on the Persian Gulf. Reza Khan was forced to flee the country and his son, Mohammad Reza was installed as a figurehead monarch, firmly under the control of the Soviets and the British.

Iran gained some semblance of independence under the Tehran Conference agreement between President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and Premier Stalin in December, 1943. This agreement guaranteed the sovereignty of Iran and perhaps even more importantly, got the Soviet Union and Britain to agree to withdraw all troops from Iran within six months from the end of hostilities.

World War II is also important historically for Iran because it was the first time the United States became significantly involved in Iranian affairs. Since World War I Iran lay clearly

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[18] Pollack, 28.
[19] Metz, 27.

in the British sphere of influence. Part of President Roosevelt's post war strategy however, was to increase U.S. influence abroad (often at the expense of Britain) and Iran was a perfect setting to implement this strategy.   Contact between the two countries accelerated after the first military aid agreement between Iran and the U.S. was signed in 1947.

In 1949 various segments of Iranian society began calling for Iran to nationalize the oil industry. Under the existing agreements between the government of Iran and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), Iran was receiving only a small portion of the oil royalties. The leader of those wanting to renegotiate the oil concession was Mohammed Mossadeq, the same Majlis member who had opposed the instillation of the Shah Reza Khan back in 1925. Mossadeq pushed for an equal split of the profits between Iran and AIOC but this offer was flatly refused by AIOC. Eventually AIOC made an offer that was well short of the fifty-fifty split requested. Mossadeq began to push the Majlis to nationalize the oil industry. The Shah, fearing that nationalization would lead the British and Americans to overthrow his reign, pushed the parliament to accept the British offer. By 1951 however, the desire for nationalization had reached its apex in the Majlis, and in March of that year a vote to nationalize the oil industry was passed.

The fallout from the decision to nationalize Iran's oil industry was immediate. Forced to submit to the will of the Majlis and accept nationalization, the Shah was also compelled to name Mossadeq as Iran's new Prime Minister. Britain immediately stopped all production of oil in Iran, froze all Iranian assets in Britain and imposed a worldwide embargo on the purchase of Iranian oil.[20]   Mossadeq took advantage of the international crisis and forced the Majlis to grant him wide latitude in running the government. Eventually Mossadeq overstepped his bounds and the Majlis began to protest his increasingly authoritarian control of the government. When the

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[20] Ibid., 30.

Majlis turned against him in August of 1953 he dissolved the parliament. He had surpassed the Shah as the most powerful man in Iran, essentially pulling off a legislative *coup d' etat*.[21]

The United States and Britain watched all of this domestic Iranian turmoil with great concern. By now the United States had settled into the Cold War paradigm, was engaged in Korea, and viewed all political events in relation to how they affected the balance of power with the Soviet Union. Although Mossadeq was an Iranian nationalist, and not a communist, the United States was fearful the Soviet Union would take advantage of the political situation in Iran. Britain played on these fears and encouraged the United States to begin to explore ways to remove Mossadeq from power. In June of 1953 President Eisenhower approved Operation Ajax, a joint U.S./British plan to overthrow Iran's new leader. By the time the plan went into execution, on August 13, 1953, Mossadeq knew of the operation and was prepared to oppose it. He refused to comply with the order of the Shah to step down and actually began to arrest government members loyal to the Shah. The Shah, fearing for his life, fled to Baghdad. It appeared the "counter coup" had failed. The Central Intelligence Agency (who had been responsible for the U.S. portion of Operation Ajax) was not ready to concede failure however. Agents for the CIA began to covertly encourage member's of Iran's Communist party, the Tudeh (who were the most anti-shah element in the country) to conduct public demonstrations in support of Mossadeq. The demonstrations of the Tudeh in support of Mossadeq galvanized the army units who were loyal to the Shah (and who were virulently anti-communist). They immediately began to battle the pro-Mossadeq forces and the conflict turned violent and bloody over the next four days. On August 19 pro-Shah military forces finished off what was left of Mossadeq's supporters and the Shah returned to Iran to reclaim his throne. Mossadeq was captured and promptly placed in prison.

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[21] Pollack, 66.

The legacy of the Mossadeq coup is burned deep into the collective memory of Iranians. Today Iranians view Mossadeq as a heroic leader who attempted to stand up to the great western powers of the U.S. and Britain. He stood for Iranian nationalism and was promptly removed by interfering foreign powers when the interests of those foreign powers were threatened. In effect, Mossadeq became a modern-day nationalist martyr in a country that has a long religious tradition of martyrdom. Thus he bridged the gap between religious and secular heroes in Iran.

During the next decade the Shah attempted to capitalize on the global competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, and portray Iran as an important ally in the containment of communism. At the same time, Iran's economy was slowly deteriorating, as what little oil profits that did remain in Iran went to build and modernize Iran's military establishment. Despite a general degree of cooperation between the Majlis and the Shah, there were issues that sharply divided the two. For example, in 1964 the anti-Americanism sentiment in Iran rose to the forefront when the Majlis were required to approve a Status of Forces Agreement between the United States and Iran. This agreement, which was fairly common between the U.S. and its overseas allies, prevented host nations from trying U.S. service members for criminal acts committed in the host country. Offending members were required to be turned over to the United States for prosecution under the U.S. (or military) legal system. In Iran however, this agreement took on special meaning. It was seen as another example of a foreign power usurping the sovereign rights of Iran. One of the most vocal critics of this proposed agreement was the cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Khomeini had been arrested once before, in June of 1963 for criticizing the Shah, but the Status of Forces Agreement issue catapulted Khomeini to national prominence. Speaking out against the agreement, Khomeini said, "If someone runs over a dog belonging to an American, he will be prosecuted. But if an American runs over the Shah…no one will have the right to interfere with him."[22] To make matters worse the vote to approve the

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[22] Ibid., 94.

agreement in the Majlis was close. 70 members voted for the agreement, and 62 were opposed, with some abstentions.[23] In a terrible case of bad timing, less than two weeks later a group of U.S. banks provided a $200 million loan to Iran with the intent of financing an arms deal with the U.S. To the Iranians it appeared to be a *quid pro quo* between the Johnson administration and the Shah.

For the remainder of the 1960's the Shah enjoyed relative freedom from criticism by the United States despite an increasing reliance on strong arm tactics, and a dubious record on human rights. Focused on the Vietnam conflict, the containment of Soviet expansion, and the need for low-priced oil, the United States was simply willing to look the other way as the Shah began to rely on his secret police (the infamous SAVAK) to maintain order. During this time the Shah exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, who first went to Turkey, and then to Iraq where he took up residence in Najaf in 1965. Further emboldening the Shah was President Richard Nixon's "Two Pillars" policy with regard to the Middle East. Fearful of Soviet expansion into the region, and worried by the withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf protectorates of Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, Nixon felt the need to show U.S. resolve in the region without the permanent deployment of U.S. troops. His solution was to support the regimes of Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

Assuming he had the complete support of the United States due to his perceived importance to U.S. foreign policy objectives, the Shah felt free to handle domestic problems as he saw fit. Unfortunately he continued to overestimate his popularity with his subjects. Two examples demonstrate this. In 1971 the Shah planned an extravagant celebration at the ancient site of Persepolis to mark 2,500 years of monarchial reign in Iran, and allusions were drawn between the current Shah, and Cyrus the Great. The problem was the celebration excluded all but a few Iranian elites, and was attended mostly by foreign dignitaries and heads of state.

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[23] Ibid., 93.

Preparation for the event involved building lavish tents in the desert that included a bath, kitchen and sitting room. The estimated cost of the event was between $100 and $200 million.[24] Another transgression occurred in 1975 when the Shah insisted that the Majlis pass legislation mandating the replacement of the Islamic calendar with one coinciding with the first year of Cyrus the Great's rule.[25] This act was derided by the clerical class and provided fuel for those who claimed the Shah was intent on de-Islamicizing Iran in favor of western values and culture.

Luckily for the Shah, Iran experienced an economic boom in the early seventies, fueled by the high price of oil. The Shah, in addition to building up his military, also spent money on modernizing his country. This effort was a double-edged sword. It boosted the standard of living (for some) and made Iran a modern country, but this modernization exposed Iran to those same influences of the west that the clerics abhorred and had been complaining about for years. Coupled with the lack of true democratization this economic expansion guaranteed Iran would eventually face an internal conflict of immense proportion.

In 1976 U.S. presidential candidate Jimmy Carter ran on a platform espousing that human rights should be an important tenet of America's foreign policy. When he was elected, many Iranians thought that he would pressure the Shah into making critical social and political reforms that would benefit Iranians who were feeling more and more oppressed. President Carter did make some initial indications that he was not pleased with the progress Iran had made, and that future U.S. aid would be tied to improvements in the regime's behavior towards its citizens. The Carter administration however, was also guilty of sending mixed signals. Hoping to get Iran to influence OPEC to lower its crude oil prices, the administration agreed to provide Iran with an arms package for AWACS aircraft and F-16's valued at over $2 billion in 1977. At the same time, student protests in Iran began to increase and the Shah instituted a sharp crackdown on demonstrations across the country. In December of 1977 more demonstrations occurred, this

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[24] Molavi, 23.
[25] Ibid., 13.

time led by religious leaders protesting the government. Again the Shah cracked down on the protesters with security forces. What happened next was another stark example of bad U.S. timing with disastrous effect. Concluding a January 1978 visit to Tehran, and coming on the heels of the December crackdown, President Carter called Iran "an island of stability in a turbulent corner of the world."[26]

Dissent continued to grow throughout the summer, as the protest movement picked up momentum. It is important to note that by late 1978 the demonstrations were no longer driven by a secular middle class expressing economic and human rights dissatisfaction with the regime. The movement was now about the Islamic faith, driven by the clerics, and centered on the theme of Islamic fundamentalism. The notion of an Iranian Islamic state came to fruition during this time period.

1979 Revolution

By the Fall of 1978, the situation in Iran was clearly getting out of hand. In September the Shah declared martial law, and in October he requested that Saddam Hussein expel Ayatollah Khomeini from Iraq. This was in response to Khomeini's increasingly fiery rhetoric calling for the overthrow of the Shah, and the establishment of an Islamic Republic. Hussein complied (probably fearing for his own regime, given the vast Shia' majority in Southern Iraq) with this request. Khomeini was forced to leave for Paris, which in retrospect was probably even worse for Shah Pahlavi, because Khomeini could take advantage of the Western media's openness and France's large Muslim population to exert additional pressure on the Iranian regime.

By November protests and demonstration had grown out of control (more than a million people rallied in the city of Mashhad against the government).[27] In December the situation became desperate and military personnel began to defect; some estimates ran as high as 1,000 a

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[26] Pollack, 75.
[27] Ibid., 134.

day.[28] Finally the Shah was ready to concede defeat. Opposition leader Shapour Bakhtiar agreed to take over the government on the condition the Shah leave the country. The Majlis approved Bakhtiar as Iran's new Prime Minister on January 3, 1979 and the Shah and his family departed Iran 13 days later.

Bakhtiar made immediate attempts to appease the populace and prevent further unrest. He released political prisoners, dissolved the dreaded SAVAK secret police and cancelled a $7 billion arms deal with the United States.[29] Khomeini, sensing the new Bakhtiar government was on shaky ground with the people, immediately declared the new government illegal, and began planning his return to Iran.   Assured of his own popularity, and more importantly, no support from the population for the Bakhtiar government, Khomeini made his triumphant return to Tehran on the first day of February, 1979 to millions of adoring Iranians. Khomeini immediately set up a provisional government in defiance of Bakhtiar. Military officers and entire units began pledging their loyalty to Khomeini. Realizing he had lost the support of the military, on 11 February Bakhtiar fled the capital and Khomeini and the revolutionaries took full control of Iran.

After a few weeks, a new constitution was submitted to the nation for a vote. The constitution which had been approved by Khomeini ahead of time, was the only choice on the ballot, and the voting was not done in secret. Not surprisingly, the new constitution was approved by over 98% of voters.[30] Ayatollah Khomeini officially declared the Islamic Republic of Iran on 1 April, 1979.

During the fall of 1979 fervent students stormed the United States embassy (for a second time, the first assault occurring in February of that year) and seized sixty-six embassy personnel. Unlike the short-lived seizure in February, this one would last for 444 days and cause irreparable harm to U.S.-Iranian relations.   Viewed in the context of Iran's modern history, the embassy

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Metz, 46.
[30] Ibid., 54.

assault was the culmination of almost 50 years of frustration with the United States (and to a lesser extent Britain) for interfering in Iranian affairs. To make matters worse, America's failed attempt to rescue the embassy personnel in April of 1980 further emboldened the new Islamic Republic and the Iranian people felt some small bit of retribution for the years they had spent under the thumb of supposed U.S. domination. The reader may scoff at the notion that Iran was ever "under the thumb" of U.S. domination. However, as Ken Pollack re-iterates throughout his book *The Persian Puzzle*, in Iran the reality of a situation is much less important than its perception. The perception was that the Shah had been a puppet of the U.S., and the brutality of his regime in the final years had been endorsed, if not ordered, by the Americans with the purpose of suppressing the Iranian people.

Meanwhile, Khomeini began his attempt to export his concept of Islamic Revolution and started with the most obvious choice: Iraq. Angered by his exile from Iraq in 1978 and appealing to the majority Shia communities in the southern part of the country, Khomeini called upon the Shia to rise up in revolt against Saddam Hussein. Saddam obviously saw this as a threat, and felt compelled to address it. An additional factor weighing on Saddam was the Iranian province of Khuzestan, which had a significant Arab minority, not to mention sizable oil reserves. Thinking that Iran would be distracted by its own internal problems, and not capable of fighting a conventional war against Iraq, Saddam invaded Iran in September of 1980.

Post-Revolution Iran

In perhaps one of the greatest miscalculations he ever made, Saddam's invasion attempt failed miserably. The Iran-Iraq war lasted eight years. Casualty estimates for both sides (both killed and wounded) exceeded one million when combined.[31] The United States was caught up in the conflict as well. The three most notable instances of U.S. involvement included the re-flagging of Kuwaiti tankers in 1987, followed by the attack on the U.S.S. Stark by an Iraqi jet

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[31] www.globalsecurity.org. "Iran-Iraq War," 14 Feb 2006.

fighter the same year, and the destruction of an Iranian civil airliner by the U.S.S. Vincennes in 1988, plunging Iranian-U.S. relations to a new low.

The Iran-Iraq was had a direct impact on the present demographic situation in Iran for two reasons. First, by suffering so many casualties in the age group of young men who fought in the war, the size of today's 30-50 year old population is much smaller than it would have been relative to the 30 year old and younger population. Second, once realizing the tremendous cost of the war in terms of human life, the Ayatollah Khomeini specifically requested that Iranians start having larger families. This boosted the number of births that would have occurred naturally during this time period, making the population "bulge" of those 30 and under even more pronounced. Hence in many ways, the social and demographic problems of Iran today were born in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988.

By the end of the war in 1988 Iran's fervor to export the revolution to other Islamic countries had abated, and it took time to recover internally from the consequences of the war. Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been in poor health for some time, finally succumbed to illness in June of 1989, and the Assembly of Experts selected Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to serve as Iran's new Supreme Leader. Khamenei was a known quantity to the conservative body of clerics since he had served as Iran's President for eight years.

Under Khamenei's leadership Islamic rules and *Sharia* law became even stricter and dissatisfaction with the growing social restrictions and weakening economic prospects led to the election of a reform candidate in 1997. This reform candidate, cleric Mohammad Khatami represented new hope for a younger generation of Iranians. As this paper will explore in later sections, Khatami's attempts at reforms and his attitudes toward the west resonated with the young, and naturally put him in conflict with the conservative clerics of Iran. Although reelected in 2001 by a wide margin, the fickleness of the Iranian electorate was demonstrated in 2005. Having had eight years to make reforms, and failing to make enough progress to satisfy the people who had supported him, the reform movement suffered a backlash of discontent. Rather

than rally behind a single reform candidate, the reformists split their vote amongst several candidates in the 2005 election. Doing so allowed a runoff between the two top vote getters, both of whom happened to be conservatives. Receiving over 60% votes (albeit with accusations of vote tampering and vote influencing) Iran's new President was former Tehran mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad. An avowed conservative, Ahmadinezhad was also critical of any attempt at normalizing relations with the United States.

What is the reader to make of this exposition on Iranian history? Six points are worth noting, because they bear directly on the discussion to follow with respect to Iranian attitudes toward westernization or modernization. First, because of Iran's strategic location and natural resources, Iran's history is filled with examples of foreign influence in its own affairs. Second, Iran's history of having its people and ideas *integrated* rather than *subjugated* by conquerors has led to a notion of superiority particularly with respect to the Arab world, and to a lesser extent with the western world. Third, the spread of Islam to Iran is unquestionably the most important historical event in Iran's history. Fourth, the embrace of the Shia' sect and the development of a clerical class is a close second as the most important historical development in Iran. Fifth, modern Iranian history is characterized by a perpetual "sandwiching" between two Great Powers; first Russia and the United Kingdom, and then the Soviet Union and the United States. Finally, since World War II, Iranians over the age of 30 have viewed the United States as the main antagonist in Iranian affairs. These six points all combine to create the complex and sometimes difficult to understand attitudes that influence Iranian youth desires.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The current political structure in Iran is a result of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and has its roots in the constitution adopted that same year. This section of the monograph will examine four topics. First, the role of Iran's two main political actors, the Supreme Leader and the President will be examined. Next the Iranian Parliament, or Majlis, will be discussed, along with several

other important legislative bodies. Third, the role of clerics will be explained with a particular emphasis on how and why the cleric class developed, and why it is so important to the Shia branch of Islam. Finally, the role of the Reform movement will be discussed.

Political Leaders

Iran's top official is the Supreme Leader. There have only been two Supreme Leaders. Ayatollah Khomeini held the position from the inception of the Islamic Republic of Iran until his death in 1989. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was selected by the Assembly of Experts to succeed him. The appointment is for life, and the fact that the Supreme Leader is both the head of state and head religious cleric gives him immense power. In the solar system of Iranian political power the Supreme Leader is the sun around which all other bodies orbit. Prior to his return to Iran in 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini began preaching about the concept of *velayat-e-faqih*. Literally translated this phrase means "rule of jurisprudence." According to Khomeini the *velayat-e-faqih* grants political power to the clergy in general, and specifically gives one individual (the Supreme Leader) the role of head of state.[32] This leader is the *faqih*, or master, and is the temporal representative of the twelfth missing Imam.[33]   Recall from the previous section of this paper that the twelfth Imam went into hiding and will one day reappear as the Mahdi. This notion of *velayat-e-faqih* gives the Supreme Leader almost unquestioned authority, particularly with regards to religious matters. In fact, interpreting this definition strictly during the reign of Khomeini, some held that since his sovereignty came directly from God, opposition to the government was tantamount to blasphemy.[34] The Supreme Leader also appoints all members of the judiciary branch of government, thus giving him extraordinary influence in the Iranian legal system. The supreme Leader's counterpart in the Iranian government is the President.

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[32] Molavi, 6.
[33] Ibid.
[34] "The Surreal World of Iranian Politics," *The Economist*, January 18, 2003, pg. 5.

The President of Iran is directly elected by the people by national ballot and is confirmed by the Majlis. Unlike the U.S. president, the Iranian President serves as the head of the legislative branch. Initially it was the wish of Khomeini that the President not be a member of the clergy. This initially held true, but after the death of the second Iranian President by assassination, the next three Presidents were clerics. With the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad in 2005, the Presidency has returned to a non-cleric.

Legislative Bodies

The Iranian parliament, known as the Majlis, is elected by popular vote, and consists of 290 members. The Majlis vote on legislation, but any legislation passed must be reviewed by the Council of Guardians. Also, before running for a Majlis seat the candidate must be approved by the Council of Guardians.

The Council of Guardians is an extremely powerful body in Iran's government. The Council consists of six clerics and six lawyers. The six clerical members are selected directly by the Supreme Leader, and the six lawyers are nominated by the Head of the Judiciary, which is also controlled by the Supreme Leader. The Majlis do get to approve by vote the six laywers who serve on the Council. The Council has veto power over any piece of legislation the Majlis passes, and can nullify passage of laws based on violation of Islamic principles or violation of Iran's constitution. Perhaps even more powerful than the Council of Guardians veto power is their power to declare candidates fit for election. The Council must approve all Presidential, Majlis, and Assembly of Experts candidates before they can run for office. The influence of the Council of Guardians can be seen in the Majlis elections of 2004. Prior to this election, the Council of Guardians disqualified 3,533 out of 8,144 candidates who wanted to run for office. This included 80 candidates who were sitting members of the Majlis.[35] By selecting who is qualified to run for

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[35] Mahan Abedin, "Iran After the Elections," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Feb/Mar 2004.

office, the Council of Guardians wields extraordinary influence on the makeup of the government of Iran.

Besides the President and the Majlis, the electorate in Iran selects 86 clerics to serve on the Assembly of Experts. Although mainly a consultative body with the theoretical power to dismiss the Supreme Leader, this body serves as a council of advisors for the Supreme Leader. Its meetings are secret and confidential. The average age of its members is over 60.[36] Hence it is very conservative by nature.

Role of Clerics

Throughout the entire depth and breadth of the Iranian political structure the clergy plays an important role. It is important to understand the rise to prominence of this class in the Shia sect of Islam. With the disappearance of the twelfth Imam, the Shia community was faced with the question of who would lead their communities. Initially, members of the faith who could interpret the Quranic scriptures, called *mujtahid*, fulfilled this role. They guided the community in the absence of the Imam.   Eventually the most respected *mujtahid* were given the title *marja-e taqlid*, or source of emulation. These "sources of emulation" essentially served as role models for those who were not *mujtahid*.[37] The hierarchy of Shia clerics began to grow from these beginnings.

After initially attending seminary at a *madrasah,* a cleric would be mentored by a more senior cleric and eventually attain the title of *hojjat-ol Islam*, or "proof of Islam." The next step in the cleric hierarchy is the well-known title *ayatollah*, which means "sign of God." The pinnacle of Islamic Shia clergy is the *ayatollah al-uzma*, meaning "greatest sign of God."[38] According to the original Iranian Islamic Republic Constitution of 1979, the Supreme Leader had to be an *ayatollah al-uzma*. This requirement created a controversy when Khomeini's hand

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[36] www.wikipedia.org. "Assembly of Experts" 14 Feb 2006.
[37] Pollack, 12.
[38] Ibid., 13.

picked successor, Ali Khamenei was selected by the Assembly of Experts as the next Supreme Leader, but had not attained the requisite rank of *ayatollah al-uzma.* This problem was resolved by naming him as the temporary leader of the country and revising the constitution, via a vote in the Majlis.[39]

The influence of the clergy permeates all facets of Iranian life. It affects the country's social, economic and foreign policies. Iran is after all a theocracy so it comes as no surprise that all of the above is true. It is the intrusion of the clerics into daily life that contributed to the rise of the reform movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Reform Movement of 1997

The Reform Movement came to prominence in Iran with the 1997 election of cleric Mohammad Khatami. Khatami came to symbolize the changes in social and economic policies the younger generation in Iran desired. Khatami was the first politician on the national level to broach the topic of re-opening relations with the United States, albeit he avoided directly mentioning the U.S. by name. Using the acceptable form of political double-speak common to the theocracy, Khatami said "We will shake hands with all countries and nations who believe in the principles of mutual respect."[40] This potential willingness to engage in contact with the United States made him a favorite with reform-minded voters and caused alarm within the conservative clergy, including the Supreme Leader, Khamenei. Khatami benefited from this loose identification with possible relation with the United States, because the majority of young Iranians had begun to tire of the government's propaganda about the evils of the United States. As Ken Pollack explains in *The Persian Puzzle*, young people started opposing whatever the

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[39] www.wikipedia.org. "Ali Khameini" 15 Feb 2006.
[40] Pollack, 315.

government said, and since the government said the U.S. was evil, it became popular to admire the U.S. as a form of political protest.[41]

There was also an element of pragmatism amongst reformers who called for resumption of relations with the United States. Many young Iranians saw other nations benefiting from globalization, and since the U.S. was the embodiment of globalization, they wanted a government that would restore relations with America.[42] Ashfin Molavi, an Iranian-born journalist observed that the desires of members of the younger generation in Iran are fairly straight-forward. "They want a job, a decent wage, a life, a chance to reclaim their dignity."[43] Relations with the U.S., it was assumed, would speed Iran's entry into the world economy. Mohammad Khatami became the symbol of hope for the Reform movement because he portrayed himself as a politician who would take on this cause and move Iran closer to a democratic society, governed by the rule of law, not by clerics issuing edicts and controlling social lifestyles.

The fact that Khatami gained the most votes in the election of 1997 came as no surprise. As mentioned above his personality and platform resonated with the younger generation in Iran. Additionally, he was seen as somewhat of an outsider to politics. Although he had served as a Majlis member and served in a ministerial position in the government, he ran for president while head of the National Library of Iran. This notion that Khatami was not an "insider" to Iranian politics played well with both the electorate and the ruling powers. It is likely that the ruling clerics in Iran saw an opportunity in allowing Khatami to be elected. His election would satisfy the desires of those calling for political reform, while the conservatives could rely on Khatami's background as a cleric to make sure he did not stray too far from the ideas of the Islamic Republic or Islamic thought in general.

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[41] Ibid., 309.
[42] Ibid., 293.
[43] Molavi, 35.

The viability of the Reform movement has come into question however, with the election in 2005 of conservative President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Seen as a serious, if not fatal setback to those advocating political reform, the election of Ahmadinejad resulted from a sense of voter fatigue by reform-minded youth. Unhappy with the progress made during the eight years of Khatami's tenure in office, Iranian reformers failed to rally behind a single candidate, thus fracturing their vote and allowing a run-off between the two top vote-getters, who happened to be conservative candidates. With no reform candidate in the final election for President, many young Iranians stayed home from the polls.

In summary, Iran is a theocracy where the clergy yields extensive power and dominates all aspects of the government. The Supreme Leader and the President are the two main political actors in Iran. The Iranian Parliament is directly elected by the people, but its authority is limited because of the veto powers of The Council of Guardians. The Council of Guardians, comprised of both clerics and lawyers, reviews all legislation to insure it complies with Islamic law and Iran's Constitution. The Council of Guardians is selected by the Supreme Leader. The Assembly of Experts is a consultative body comprised of clerics who advise the Supreme Leader.

ATTITUDES

This section of the paper begins an examination of the attitudes of the Iranian youth population. By attitudes, the author simply means, "How this generation feels about the present state of affairs." This is distinguishable from the next section of this paper, which will examine desires, or "What this generations wants for the future." These Iranian feelings will be broken down into three broad categories. These categories are political, economic and social. The same framework will be used in the "Desires" section of the paper. In general, this section will show that the "under-30 generation" feels apathetic to any real possibility of political reform, instead focusing on the importance of economic, and to a lesser degree, social freedoms that are considered more important right now.

Before beginning the discussion on Iranian youth attitudes, it is important to review the demographics of this group because it weighs heavily on the conclusions drawn at the end of this work. As stated earlier, Iran is one of the youngest countries in the world, with 70% of its population under 30 years old, and half under the age of 21.[44] In 1995 the median age in Iran was 17.6 years. The U.S. median age in that same year was 34.9 years.[45] This explosion of youth can be traced to Ayatollah Khomeini's call for large families as part of his efforts to solidify the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and to lessen the catastrophic human cost of the war with Iraq. In doing so, Khomeini planted the seeds of the current generation's dissatisfaction with life under the Islamic Republic. According to Ken Pollack this generation of Iranians began to chafe under the strict Islamic social codes as they came of age. Because they were specifically banned, things as simple as meeting in public with members of the opposite sex, listening to pop music, and holding hands in public became acts of defiance against the regime.[46] Hence, simple social actions took on political significance. It is important to realize that this social dissatisfaction with the regime almost always preceded political dissatisfaction, and represented a very common process for the average young Iranian. As this age group matured in the mid to late 1990s the United States came to symbolize what this group of Iranians wanted most. As the physical embodiment of freedom, material goods, glamour, movies and popular music, Pollack contends that by the end of the 1990s Iran was one of the most pro-American countries in the world, in terms of cultural admiration.[47]

Political Attitudes

This desire for change finally manifested itself politically with the election of Mohammed Khatami as the nation's President in 1997. Khatami, a reform-minded cleric who

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Pollack, 305.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 309.

had spent considerable time in the West, derived key political support from an amalgam of reform oriented student, youths and women in particular.[48] Khatami's ascendancy is easy to understand, given that 52% the electorate is under the age of 30.[49] Given the high expectations of the Khatami government, it might be argued that Khatami was destined to fail, given the political structure of Iran's government. As mentioned in the preceding section, the real political power in Iran lays with the Supreme Leader, and the Council of Guardians. Hence Khatami was forced to work around the edges of the political system and was unable to effect the large changes his supporters wanted. The conservatives in power became very adept at instigating events designed to make Khatami look bad. One popular method was to jail student opposition leaders. As a prominent student leader stated during this time period, "They (the conservatives)…create political crises so they can undermine Khatami and the reformers. If they create enough chaos Khatami will seem to be losing control."[50]

Regrettably, this strategy worked. Although re-elected in 2001, Khatami was unable to make enough reforms to satisfy his constituents. There was a disconnect between the people and the reformers they had elected. The people expected massive changes, and the reformers in government did not want to violate the political and cultural norms established by the Islamic Republic and defended vigorously by the conservatives.[51] The disenchantment with political reform is summed up nicely by a 25 year-old student who commented, "I went to the big protests 4 years ago (in 1999) and was attacked…with an electric shocking device. I decided from then on I would have nothing more to do with politics…I want to finish my studies abroad and I can't do that if I'm in...(prison)."[52] Practicality had overcome idealism in the minds of the youth generation. This abandonment of hope for political change is shown starkly in the voter turnout

[48] Katzman, 2.
[49] Bahman Baktiari, and Haleh Vaziri, "Iran's Liberal Revolution", *Current History*, January, 2002. 19.
[50] Molavi, 98.
[51] Abedin.
[52] *Iran: Discontent And Disarray*, International Crisis Group Middle East Briefing, 15 October 2003, 8.

for the 2003 municipal election held in Iran. In 1999, at the height of Khatami's popularity, participation was at 60%. In 2003 that number had dropped to less than 30%.[53] This apathy for the reform movement continued its downward trend and is largely responsible for the election of a conservative President in 2005.

Therefore, the conclusion one draws is that the current generation of Iranian youth feel any chance of real political reform is unlikely. The experience of the Khatami Presidency has made it clear that the conservatives, in conjunction with the clerics, are not interested in meaningful political reform. As a result, the youth of Iran have in essence, returned to their roots, and concentrated on economic and social reform.

Economic Attitudes

How do the young Iranians feel about economic reform? Most young Iranians feel economic paralysis is the single biggest obstacle to their happiness and hence, desire increased economic opportunity. Before exploring this simple desire, some economic statistics are useful in understanding the scope of this problem. Although unemployment is officially listed at 16% by the government of Iran, some experts put it over 20%.[54] Furthermore, for those under the age of 25, an astonishing 85% are estimated to be unemployed.[55]   The economic prospects of college graduates are no less grim. Because the economy of Iran is so moribund, there is only 1 job for every 23 graduates.[56] This economic stagnation has led the International Monetary Fund to proclaim that Iran has the highest case of "brain drain' among 61 developing and less developed nations in the world.[57]

This "brain drain" phenomenon can be better understood by examining the current collegiate system in Iran. Historically, Iran has always had a robust and respected university

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[53] Ibid., 1.
[54] "Iran; Discontent and Disarray", 3.
[55] Baktiari, 19.
[56] Ibid.
[57] "Iran; Discontent and Disarray", 3.

system modeled after the western system of higher education. With the Islamic revolution of 1979, however, the system was radically altered. Unhappy with the "Westoxification" of the university system in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini shut down all universities so a curriculum that adhered to Islamic principles could be developed and instituted. This shut down lasted three years. When universities re-opened the curriculum they taught had a heavy emphasis on religion and it was forbidden to teach any academic topic that was judged to be in conflict with Islam. Furthermore, all applicants had to pass a government-sponsored entrance examination before they could be admitted to a university. It is interesting to note that those students who memorize the Quran are exempt from taking the entrance exam, and are admitted automatically as a reward for their piety.[58] Despite the rigorous exam, and an over-emphasis on religious knowledge, competition for admission to Iran's universities is fierce. In 1993 1.18 million students took the exam. Unfortunately, a mere 130,000 (11%) were selected, based on the simple fact that Iran does not have the physical capacity to admit more students.[59] University admittance is seen as one of the few methods the younger generation has of advancing economically. Regrettably, graduation from university carries with it no guarantees of economic success. The lack of jobs available to graduates is exemplified by a report in 2000 that 8,000 physicians were unable to find work in Iran.[60] Furthermore, those who do graduate are unhappy with the quality of the education they receive "believing that they are not being prepared to compete with their cohorts from other countries in the new era of global economy."[61]

Clearly then, a link between the inadequate opportunities for higher education and the "brain drain" mentioned above exists. This flight of young Iranians seeking better educational and economic opportunities abroad is reflected in the number of youth who seek to emigrate

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[58] Akbar E. Torbat, "The Brain Drain From Iran To The United States", *The Middle East Journal*, Spring, 2002, 287.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 284.
[61] Ibid., 288.

legally from Iran. In 2001, 200,000 Iranians received permission to emigrate, and there has been

an increase in illegal emigration as well.[62] Smugglers have been reportedly charging between

five and six thousand dollars to provide passage to Western Europe for those who have no chance

of obtaining the necessary paperwork to immigrate legally and are desperate to leave Iran.[63]

Author Molavi tells of many young Iranians, particularly engineers and computer programmers

who make "pilgrimages" to the Canadian Embassy in Syria in hopes of obtaining work visas.[64]

However, because of the Iranian government's anti-western rhetoric, many young Iranians are

finding it increasingly difficult to obtain student and work visas in western countries. As one

frustrated student laments "Everyone hates us because we are Iranians and Muslims."[65] They

blame the government for this dilemma, and it helps to further distance the younger generation

from those who rule Iran.

Therefore, one can state with certainty that the younger generation in Iran is frustrated by

their poor economic prospects, they hold the government responsible for this situation, and many

younger Iranians are expressing this economic frustration by attempting to leave the country in

pursuit of better opportunities to earn a living.

Social Attitudes

This brings us to the third category of the framework used to analyze the attitudes of the

Iranian youth generation. The social attitudes of this generation are perhaps the most important

because they drive the other two attitudes discussed in this paper. Social attitudes are also the

area the United States has the greatest potential to influence. Broadly speaking, the young

generation in Iran wants the kinds of social freedoms more commonly associated with western

nations. They find the social restrictions the Islamic Republic places on them oppressive, and

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[62] Molavi, 17.
[63] Tim Judah, "The Sullen Majority," *New York Times Magazine*, 1 September, 2002, 47.
[64] Molavi,17.
[65] Judah, 47.

have taken to living a split lifestyle. This means that the young generation has learned to act one way in public, and another way in private, particularly around the *Basij*, the paramilitary group responsible for policing the Islamic conduct codes enforced in Iran.

Women deserve particular mention with regards to social attitudes in Iran.[66] Women constitute over 50% of the university students in Iran, and are perhaps the most progressive of any Muslim country in their political participation. Women have regularly served as members of the Iranian parliament. It is somewhat paradoxical that the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which imposed strict social and moral codes on the nation, is in some ways responsible for the growing influence of women in Iran. Prior to the revolution, many Iranian women were not permitted to leave the home by husbands or fathers who felt it would be immoral for their female relatives to be seen in public. However, Ayatollah Khomeini instituted Islamic *hijab*, or the act of dressing modestly. By doing so, he removed the reason many women had been forced to remain in their homes. By complying with hijab women could attend school, work, and participate in public life. Participation and education led to advocacy for increased rights for women. Perhaps the ultimate sign of progress for women in Iran was the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to lawyer Shirin Ebadi for her work in human rights. Ebadi was the first Iranian, and the first Muslim woman to win the Peace Prize. Not surprisingly, the government of Iran was reluctant to acknowledge the award, and even the reformist-minded President Khatami felt the need to distance himself from the award by claiming that the Peace Prize was a political award, and not as relevant as the scientific and technical Nobel awards.[67]

Another area that reveals the social attitudes of the young generation in Iran is their attraction to, and propensity to use technology. Notably, younger Iranians are very sophisticated and proficient when it comes to cell phone usage, satellite television and the Internet. Cell phone

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[66] For a more comprehensive treatment of this topic see *Reading Lolita In Iran: A Memoir In Books*, by Azar Nafisi, or Geneive Abdo and Jonathan Lyons work, *Answering Only To God: Faith And Freedom In Twenty-First Century Iran*.

[67] www.wikipedia.org. "Shirin Ebadi" February 27, 2006.

usage in Iran is exploding at a phenomenal rate. Although lagging far behind Egypt and Saudi Arabia in total number of users, at 3.376 million, the state-controlled telecommunications firm Iran Mobile cannot keep up with demand. It is set to negotiate a contract with a South African company to provided expanded service, and lower the annual user's fee from approximately $500 a year to $178 a year. Estimates predict that there could be 30 million cell phone users in Iran by 2010.[68]

Perhaps no technology has helped shaped the social attitudes of Iran's youth more than the Internet. In addition to giving Iran's youth a source of news that is unfiltered by government censors, it also provides a forum for expression of the frustrations of this generation, through websites and web logs (or blogs, as they are commonly referred to).

According to the CIA Factbook, in 2003 there were just 5,269 Internet hosts (hosts run servers that provide internet content) in Iran. However, Internet use has increased exponentially from 1.75 million users in 2002, to 4.3 million in 2003, to 7.0 million in 2004. Official government sources in Tehran estimate this number will more than double to 15.0 million by 2006.[69] Women in particular have flocked to the internet because it gives them an avenue to discuss those topics that are taboo in public life. The Internet also grants both men and women some degree of anonymity and security from government observation. Furthermore, the Internet opens avenues of expression that are officially curtailed by the government. One anecdotal example is of a young Iranian pop band that attempted to get permission from the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to release a CD of their songs. After five months of haggling over such things as the propriety of the lyrics, and the quality of the singer's voice, the band became fed up and simply posted their music on the Internet for anyone to download![70]

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[68] Neil Ford, "MTN to edge out Turkcell in Iran." *The Middle East*, January, 2006, 37.
[69] Milan Vesely, "www.irantopsites.com", *The Middle East*, November, 2004, 24.
[70] Judah, 45.

The phenomenon of blogs is having an immediate impact on the ability of young Iranians to make their attitudes known, and to challenge those in authority. While still President, Mohammad Khatami mention at a U.N. summit that more blogs are written in Persian than any other language except English and French.[71] The appeal of blogs to Iranian youth is easy to see. As one young Iranian puts it, "Socially in Iran, we haven't experienced a [free] society where everyone can express their ideas.   We don't experience the freedom of expression that much. Weblogs give the opportunity to Iranians to speak freely and share their ideas, their views, and even the details of their personal lives."[72] Reflecting the notion that young Iranians are more socially motivated than politically motivated, Iran journalist Sina Motabelli states "A large number of Iranian youngsters who write Weblogs are not very political. They have more social ideas [than political]."[73] One exception to this notion that does have political overtones is the fear the government has of blogs. Motabelli explains this fear. "They're afraid of Weblogs because we don't have the experience of an [open] society. The government is very afraid of them."[74]

An examination of 45 Iranian blog sites written in English and listed on blogsbyirianians.com reveals that most blogs (71%) are indeed not dedicated to overt political discourse but rather to a host of non-political topics. Poetry is a highly popular subject, reflecting the Iranian affinity for prose. The popularity of blogs is further indicated by the 2005 study by the website "Blog Herald", which estimated the number of Iranian blogs at 700,000. As mentioned before, blogging provides a particular avenue of expression for Iranian women, who are unable to express themselves politically and socially to the same extent men in Iran are permitted to do so. In fact, Hossein Derakhshan, known more popularly as "Hoder" to Iranian

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[71] Mark Glasser, "Iranian Journalist Credits Blogs For Playing Key Role In His Release From Prison," *Online Journalism Review*, 9 January, 2004.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

bloggers, feels "it's the first time in Iranian history that women can openly and publicly talk about their point of view, their perspective toward the world."[75]   One example of this enabling power of blogs is the ability to publicly question one's religious beliefs. The author of this paper found examples where two female Iranians respectively questioned the religious necessity of fasting during Ramadan and submitting to Allah's will at the expense of free choice. Thoughts like these could not likely be expressed in public by either a man or a woman in Iran.

Another interesting aspect of blogging is the proliferation of Iranian blog sites that are written in English. By writing in English, these authors get worldwide exposure to their ideas and thoughts, and it is easy to speculate that this is one method reform and women's rights advocates use in an attempt to build international sympathy. It should be noted, however, that this English-only examination may represent a skewed data set to examine the attitudes and desires of an entire population set. It is left to the reader to determine the full significance of this phenomenon. Finally, there is perhaps no clearer sign of the importance blogs have taken in Iran than government acknowledgement of their importance. The First Festival for Islamic Revolutionary Blogs and Websites was recently sponsored by the Iranian Ministry of Culture.[76]

Another interesting aspect of cultural attitudes toward technology is Iranians' affinity for satellite television. Despite being officially banned by the government, an estimated 9 million Iranians regularly tune in to satellite TV broadcasts. The influence of satellite TV on the Iranian populace has even been acknowledged by Iranian politicians. In 2005, former Majlis member Mehdi Karrubi decided to start his own satellite TV station, named Saba. Planning to operate the station out of Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, Karrubi was motivated in part by his unsuccessful bid to run for President in the 2005 elections. The government is naturally opposed

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[75] Hossein Derakhshan, www.hoder.com
[76] Ibid.

to his attempt.[77] Author Thomas Friedman, in his book on the effects of globalization *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, describes the combined effects of Iranian desires for access to western entertainment, and a free market economy. "When I visited Tehran in 1997 I found that some of those in south Tehran who had televisions were setting up a few chairs and selling tickets when the most popular American television shows came on each week (courtesy of a satellite).   The most popular show was Baywatch…"[78]

The degree to which the Iranian government is concerned with this problem is clearly evident. On six separate occasions from 1997 through 2005 the government tried to jam the satellite signal of Simaye Azadi, a Persian-language satellite television station. The government has even been accused of asking Cuba to jam signals aimed at Iran originating in the United States. This allegation prompted a Voice of America Board of Governors chairman to publicly denounce the act, which occurred in July of 2003.[79]

What's the relevance of satellite television with regard to Iranian social attitudes? Essentially, satellite television serves as a medium through which Iranians are exposed to not only western ideas, but more importantly ideas that do not come from an official government source. Satellite TV is a tool with the proven potential to reach a significant portion of the technically oriented youth of Iran, and it is a method that is robust and technically mature here in the United States. There are currently over 19 Farsi speaking satellite TV channels broadcasting in the United States, mainly centered in the Southern California area and catering to the largest expatriate population of Iranians in the world.

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[77] Farnaz Ghazizadeh, "Satellite TV, Islamic Regime's Red Line," www.regimechangeiran.blogspot.com, 29 August, 2005.

[78] Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus And The Olive Tree*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000), 68.

[79] "Iran Government Jamming Exile Satellite TV," www. Iranfocus.com, 14 July, 2005

Therefore, one can conclude that Iranian social attitudes drive their attitudes toward the current Iranian economic and political system. In general, this young demographic feels socially constrained, economically deprived and politically repressed.

DESIRES

This section will examine the desires (i.e. wants for the future), that the under-30 generation of Iran has. Again, these desires will be examined using three categories: political, economic and social. This section will show that in general, the youth in Iran are focused on social and economic reform (in that order) and although desiring political reform, have come to accept that the current government is unlikely to give in to meaningful political reform.

For those in the United States who wait for the day when the masses of disaffected Iranian students rise up and throw off the yoke of the clerics and institute a western-style democracy, the reality of the situation in Iran will not be comforting. Given the current political structure in Iran, such an event is unlikely because the clerics and the Supreme Leader hold the key structures of power in Iran. The Supreme Leader, through the Council of Guardians, and to a lesser extent the Assembly of Experts, runs the country. The Majlis and the President have no real independent source of power.   Two major events have convinced the youth in Iran that any process of governmental change in Iran will be evolutionary, rather the revolutionary.

Political Desires

The first event leading to the above assertion was the government reaction to the student-led demonstrations in 1999. These demonstrations represented a real call for government reform, including giving President Khatami real legislative authority, and called for the conservative clerics to give up their place in Iranian politics. The government responded with strong arm tactics, including unleashing the Basij and other security forces to put down the student rebellion. Although the student uprisings did not have a defining single event, like Tiananmen Square, the outcome was essentially the same. The government's tolerance for open opposition to the regime

was limited, and the students had reached that limit. Further damaging to the youth reformers' spirit was the support President Khatami was forced to give publicly for the government's efforts to install order.

The second event that forced the youth generation to view political reform as a long-term proposition was the total lack of progress made by Khatami by the end of his second four-year term as President of Iran. Initially patient and not expecting Iran to change overnight, the younger generation in Iran realized by the end of Khatami's term in 2005 that not even modest changes to the political system in Iran had occurred. The conservative clerics were still in power, and unlikely to moderate their views. Given the size of their electorate, and the majority election of multiple reform candidates just four years earlier, the election results of 2005 were a clear sign that the younger generation of Iranians had decided to opt out of the political scene, and resigned themselves to focusing on social and economic advances.

Hence, although the under-30 generation desires political change, they accept that such change is not possible at this time. Therefore this younger generation of Iranians has devoted its energies to making advances in the economic and social sectors.

Economic Desires

The desires of young Iranians in the economic sector are fairly easy to enumerate. This group wants an end to the lackluster economy that has some Iranian economists estimating that 40% of the nation lives below the poverty line (it should be noted official estimates of the same figure are 15%).[80] They want an economy that does better than provide only half of the 800,000 jobs required each year.[81] This group wants access to higher education based on merit, not based on religious affiliation or membership in organizations friendly to the conservative regime. Groups like the Bajis or Iranian Revolutionary Guards Council receive quotas for university

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[80] "Iran: Discontent and Disarray," 1.
[81] Ray Takeyh, "Iran's Emerging National Compact", *World Policy Journal*, Fall, 2002, 47.

admission. More universities in general would help to alleviate the critical shortage of spots for students in universities. Until the acceptance rate of applicants rises above 11% Iran will continue to shortchange its youth. Finally, young Iranians want skills that make them competitive in the world marketplace. They understand technology, have an affinity for it, and realize the phenomenon of globalization, and what it will take to succeed in this new environment. Although overcoming the grip the *bazaari* merchant class has on the economy will be difficult, this younger generation wants to begin the steps required to integrate Iran's economy into the rest of the world.

Social Desires

The category of social desires of the under-30 demographic arguably represents the area where this group is most likely to make advances with the current conservative government. Part of this reasoning is that some of these social advances are either beyond the control of the government, or are not yet well understood by the government. The Internet and Weblogs are two examples. Abbas Milani, a historian at the Hoover Institute, has stated that socially, Iranians "want what every youth wants in the world. They want jobs, they want entertainment, they want freedom, they want to go into the streets and hold the hands of their beloved."[82]

It is clearly apparent from the proliferation of blogs and Internet usage, that this generation wants the social freedom to express their thoughts and lose the restriction placed on them by the religious conservatives. Although the majority of this generation doesn't feel the need to abandon religion, they want the choice to express their piety as they see fit, rather than being told by the government how to express it. This sentiment is particularly seen in women in the various interpretations of the *hijab* requirement for dress in public.[83]

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[82] Transcript 739 "Great Expectations," Hoover Institution, April, 2003, www.uncommonknowledge.org, Sept 6, 2005.

[83] Gary Sick, Nikki R. Keddie, and Azita Karimkhan, "Women In Iran: An Online Discussion," *Middle East Policy*, December, 2001, 136-137.

GOVERNMENT REACTIONS

Whatever reactions the government takes in response to pressure exerted by the under-30 members of Iranian society for change will likely effect any potential U.S.-Iranian relations either due to the media attention they draw, or the instability that may result from such government reactions. Using historical precedent it is possible to make predictions on how the current Iranian regime would react to desires for change in each framework (political, economic, and social). One fact runs true through all three frameworks however. Regardless of the action taken, the regime in Iran has consistently shown that when required it will act in a manner that ensures its survival, and if the opportunity is available, it will act to increase its power relative to the population. Overall, this section will attempt to convince the reader that the government reactions to any political desire for increased freedoms will be immediate and swift, while reactions to social and economic desires for change may be publicly opposed, but privately accepted.

Political Reactions

The current Iranian government has a long history of remaining wedded to the political vision of the Islamic Revolution as annunciated by Ayatollah Khomeini. It is unlikely that this political paradigm will change any time soon. No greater proof of this is the election in 2005 of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the office of President. Ahmadinejad's election signaled a return to the theologic conservatism that symbolized the revolution prior to Khatami's election in 1997. Although not a cleric himself, Ahmadinejad did serve as a commander in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Council and was a member of the Bajis, the paramilitary organization that is responsible for ensuring Iranians conform to Islamic principles of conduct.[84] Ahmadinejad had been serving as mayor of Tehran, and was tacitly approved by the ruling government apparatus

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[84] Katzman, 4.

once it was clear he would be one of the two run-off candidates for the presidential election. Ahmadinejad's election campaign attempted to marginalize the youth movement's desires for reform by focusing on the growing economic divide between the rural and urban poor, and those benefiting economically from Iran's limited free-market reforms.[85] Additionally, Ahmadinejad did not display any enthusiasm for better relations with the United States.

Another historical precedent for the continued Iranian government resistance to a political compromise of power with the post-Khomeini generation was the immediate and forceful response to the student protests of 1999. It is widely accepted that some student deaths resulted from this repression, although no official casualty reports were ever issued. Perhaps more important than the student crackdown itself was the government's success in co-opting President Khatami. Khatami was forced to admit publicly that the government's strong actions were necessary. Co-opting Khatami in this manner truly demonstrated that the regime would not allow the reformists the opportunity to make any meaningful changes to the current political structure in Iran.

Economic Reactions

Iran's reaction to calls for economic reform may be more pragmatic, despite public statements to the contrary.   Mehdi Chamran, an advisor to President Ahmadinejad, stated recently "it doesn't make any difference to us whether or not foreign firms operate in Iran. It's not a priority for us."[86] The reality is different. With most of Iran's economy tied directly to the export of oil, the government must do something to reverse the sliding Iranian economy. An Iranian government report recently predicted that by 2007 unemployment for those 15-29 years

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[85] Babak Pirouz and Stanley Reed, "A Watershed in Iranian politics." *Business Week Online*, 28 June, 2005.
[86] "Iran: What Does Ahmadi-Nejad's Victory Mean?" International Crisis Group Briefing No. 18, August 2005, 9.

old will reach 52%.[87] Another symbol of the poor economic policies of Iran is the subsidized gasoline industry. Iranians pay about 25 cents a gallon for gasoline and the country is actually a net importer of this commodity.[88] Hence, Iran must spend some of its foreign currency reserves on fuel at market prices, and then sell that fuel for a loss to domestic consumers. The economic brain drain also continues to erode Iran's capability to advance economically. For example, during the 1980s and first half of the 1990s Iran ranked number five in the number of refugees requesting permission to settle in the United States. This human capital flight has led to between 1.5-2.5 million Iranians working abroad.[89]

It was the dismal economic performance of Iran's economy that also helped create the conditions which contributed to President Ahmadinejad's election. Running mostly on a platform that promised economic reform, Ahmadinejad promised to take on the graft and corruption that is attached to the Iranian economic system which emphasizes favoritism and is partially controlled by the powerful *bonyad* system, in collusion with the *bazzari* merchant class. The *bonyads* are the powerful Islamic charities that are estimated to control up to 40% of Iran's economy. Since they are considered charitable institutions they are not required to pay taxes, nor are they subject to accounting or fiduciary scrutiny.

Therefore, despite rhetoric to the contrary about the need for foreign investment, actions have shown otherwise. Economic deals with the European Union, Russia and China show that the government is willing to participate in the free market system, and doing so will invariably lead to more transparency in its own economy, with benefits to those young Iranians who thirst for gainful employment and the ability to purchase consumer goods regularly available to those in the west.

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[87] Ibid., 5.

[88] Jahangir Amuzegar, "Iran's Theocracy Under Siege," *Middle East Policy*, Spring, 2003, 148-149.

[89] Torbat, 287.

Social Reactions

Iran's government faces a similar situation in the social sphere, and this dilemma is linked to the economic situation discussed above. Similar to the behavior of Iranian youth, the Iranian government acts one way in public, but accepts certain behaviors in private. A classic example is the nationwide ban on satellite television dishes and the attempt to ban foreign satellite TV signals, as mentioned previously in this paper. Despite the legal prohibition, hundreds of thousands of dishes exist in Iran, and the government does not have an aggressive program in place to find and seize them. The treatment of women is also an example of policy yielding to reality. The government of Iran has attempted to marginalize the role of women in Iranian society. In the recent presidential election all of the women candidates were deemed unqualified to run by the Council of Guardians. Also, when Iranian lawyer Shirin Ebadi became the first Iranian to win the Nobel Peace prize for her role in advancing women's and children's rights in Iran, the government downplayed her selection. This came after the government had previously revoked her license to practice law.[90] This attempt to reduce the public role of women in Iranian society contradicts the fact that over half of the undergraduate population in Iranian universities is female!

Furthermore, the Tehran government is facing some stark statistics regarding social decline. Divorce statistics for Iran are much higher than in other Islamic countries. 25% of all marriages in Tehran end in divorce, and 70% of those divorces are a result of drug addiction, which has become a growing problem in Iran. This drug problem is related to the unemployment pressures mentioned above as out-of-work youth look for ways to escape the boredom and listlessness some of them feel. Additionally, a government official has acknowledged the presence of 300,000 prostitutes in the country, with over half of them between the ages of 13 and

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[90] Sick, *et al*., 129.

19.[91]   Such social problems are on the increase and the government has been frustrated by its lack of success in efforts to control these problems, let alone manage the perception that there even is a problem. An example of this frustration is the crackdown on reform minded newspapers in 2001. In an attempt to control media reporting of such negative issues the government reduced newspaper circulation 45% from a high of 3.12 million to just 1.75 million in 2001.[92] This attempt was futile however, as reformists migrated to the Internet. As one writer commented wryly about the government's attempt to shutdown the print media, "Technology always wins, and therefore closure of the reformist newspapers is unimportant when there is the Internet."[93] The Iranian government has attempted to filter outside websites advocating reform, and shut down domestic sites it views as advocating social reform, however, this attempt has been largely ineffective, given the difficult technical nature of controlling the Internet.

Reviewing the Iranian government's historical precedent for reacting to calls for change in the political, economic and social nature of Iran demanded by the youth of Iran, it is apparent that the government is likely to react very critically and with authority to suppress any calls for change to the political structure of Iran. As a senior policy official in Iran commented, "The Supreme Leader, the reflection of the regime consensus, has a survivalist mentality that will lead him to try and preserve the status quo."[94] In the areas of economic and social change however, the government is much less rigid in its approach to confronting these problems and exercises some degree of flexibility and pragmatism, often adopting one policy in public, and another in private. The government has even shown the ability to reverse itself, such as in the case of attempting to control the Internet.

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[91] Amuzegar, 144.
[92] Baktiari, 19.
[93] Takeyh, 48.
[94] "Iran: What Does Ahmadi-Nejad's Victory Mean?" 11.

COMPROMISES

Given the complex nature of Iran's government, and the sophisticated nature of the under-30 generation in Iran, it is reasonable to conclude that in some areas the government of Iran might be willing to reach an accommodation with younger Iranians on certain issues. With the notable exception of political reform, neither side has shown an "all or nothing" attitude with regard to certain policy changes. A middle ground on some issues may be acceptable, regardless of whether the negotiations between the government and the youth generation are formal or informal. This section of the paper will examine what those compromises might look like. In general, this section will show that compromise is most likely in the area of social freedoms, followed closely by economic freedoms.

Political Compromises

If the tenure of President Khatami from 1997-2005 can be viewed an attempt at a political compromise between the regime and the Iranian populace (as many thought it would be) then by any measure this compromise was a failure and the regime took advantage of the fact that the Reformists, who had won the support of the youth generation, could not effect the change in Iran's political system that many had sought. Summed up nicely in an International Crisis Group Report, "Khatami's frustrating 8 years in office showed decisions ultimately rested with the Supreme Leader and other unelected officials and they were not about to change."[95] Author Afshin Molavi relates how the candidacy of Khatami was an attempt by the younger generation of Iran to create a "democratic space" that would allow them the freedom of action to pursue some of the other social and economic policy changes they desired. This "democratic space" ended up competing with the "authoritarian space" inhabited by the conservative bodies in Iran, such as the Supreme Leader, the Islamic judiciary, and the Council of Guardians.[96] Based on the

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[95] Ibid., 10.
[96] Molavi, 5.

successive series of attacks against the reformists, the concept of a "democratic space" was untenable.

Another factor which makes political compromise improbable is the insistence of the current regime that official contact with the United States, whether direct, or indirect, is neither desired, or necessary. The end result, as mentioned in Meghan O' Sullivan's work *Shrewd Sanctions*, is that "…relations with the U.S. have been the "third rail" of domestic Iranian politics. No individual or faction can advocate compromise or even dialogue with the U.S. without opening itself to fierce criticism."[97] The current government's unwavering commitment to this position makes it unlikely to yield to desires for political change, since the younger generations of Iranians has expressed a specific interest in better relations with the United States.

Economic Compromises

In the area of economics, the current regime may be willing to compromise for two reasons. The first is that Iran's economy is woefully inadequate to address the needs of its population, particularly the younger generation. As mentioned in the previous sections, with only half of all graduates from university securing employment, and the current rate of unemployment leading to undesired social ills manifesting themselves in Iranian society, the government has plenty of incentive to address the economic policy changes demanded by the under-30 demographic. One example of this willingness to compromise economically is the expansion of Iran's cell phone infrastructure. Awarding a foreign firm a contract to improve Iran's communication capability shows that the government acknowledges steps must be taken to become competitive in the new era of globalization. Iran also is pursuing World Trade Organization admission, and is willing to accept the standards of economic transparency imposed on nations accepted for member status.

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[97] Meghan O' Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2003), 74.

Another economic area that Iran's government could capitalize on is a relaxation of the rules on those portions of the economy controlled by the state, and the development of an entrepreneurial class that has the potential to create jobs in the private sector. The creation of additional jobs in Iran through entrepreneurship would help stem the "brain drain" phenomenon Iran is currently facing, and ease the problem of "underemployment" that affects the young generation of college graduates. It should be noted that this course of action is likely to be opposed by the existing merchant class, since entrepreneurs are likely to threaten the *bazzari's* influence with the regime.

Social Compromises

The area of social compromise holds the greatest promise for gains by Iranian youth. It is also the area where the United States can assist the young Iranians the most. Why would the Iranian regime be willing to compromise on certain social policies with respect to the young Iranians growing up in the post-Khomeini era? The answer is two fold. First, even those hardliners in the government cannot ignore the demographic nature of this problem. There are simply too many young Iranians for the regime to do nothing. As an Olin Fellow at Yale's International Security Studies program related, "Increasing numbers of conservatives are beginning to appreciate that their long-term relevance is contingent on their ability to engage Iran's youth and their commitment to the creation of a tolerant society."[98] The second reason the regime is willing to engage Iran's youth on social issues is the desire to stay in power. In order to advance the Revolution (or at the very least sustain it) those in power in Iran recognize the necessity of maintaining their position of control.

What form might this social compromise take? Ken Pollack feels the Iranian government might adopt what he terms "the China policy," following Beijing's attempts at compromise with its growing middle class. This model would grant young Iranians more social freedoms in the

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[98] Takeyh, 48.

areas of dress, entertainment, culture and social contact with members of the opposite sex. In return for these freedoms, there would be an implicit agreement to give up the call for political reform, by greatly reducing or eliminating political activity against the government.[99] Such actions would benefit the government in two ways. First, by trading a relaxation of social standards for a reduction in political tension with the young generation, the government can assure its grasp on the political system. Second, by satisfying the needs of the younger generation socially, Iran could concentrate resources on the economic problems the country needs to solve.

This avenue of approach to social compromise is likely to succeed, since this paper has shown that the youth of Iran's desire for social change outweighs that of political change. An exchange of social freedoms for tacit approval of the existing political power structure by the youth of Iran is a deal that both sides could accept.

CONCLUSIONS

What has this examination of the attitudes and desires of Iran's post-Khomeini generation with regards to political, economic and social generation revealed? From the evidence presented in this paper it is possible to draw four general conclusions about Iran and its youth society. It is also possible to identify three leverage points the United States may choose to take advantage of to influence this younger generation of Iranians. Finally, it is possible to make a prediction on the likelihood of a conflict between the current conservative government in Iran and the under-30 demographic this paper has studied.

The first conclusion of this paper is that in the near-term the current generation of young Iranians has given up on trying to effect political change or reform in Iran. Instead they have turned their attention to more pressing economic and social needs. The qualifier "in the near-term" is used to remind the reader that the desire for political change has not been abandoned entirely, but it has dropped to the least important desire of Iranian youth at the present time. The

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[99] Pollack, 371.

failure of the Khatami Presidency and the Majlis during the 1997-2005 time period to deliver any meaningful reform in any of the three frameworks discussed in this paper (political, economic or social) proved to young Iranians that the Supreme Leader, acting through the Council of Guardians and the various state security instruments, was unwilling to compromise when it came to matters of political reform. The crackdown of the student protests in 1999 confirmed this, and the election of a conservative presidential candidate (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad) in 2005 acknowledged the abandonment of any strong desire for political reform by the Iranian youth, who are a majority of the electorate.

The second conclusion drawn is that any regime change in Iran will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. The reason for this is two-fold. In addition to putting economic and social reform desires ahead of desires for political reform, the power structure that currently exists in Iran makes political reform at this time difficult if not impossible. As an International Crisis group report states "Iran is governed by a complex set of elected and unelected individuals and institutions…a set of competing power centers inherently favoring continuity."[100] Daniel Brumberg goes further explaining, "Whether we like it or not, the principle and practice of clerical rule have proven capable of enduring considerable external and internal strain. The probability of collapse or rollback is slim indeed."[101] It is apparent that even those who do desire quicker political change in Iran recognize the struggle they face. A popular reformist activist tells his students "You need to organize a crowd of 100,000 to remove the mayor (of Tehran), 1 million to remove the President, and 10 million to remove the Supreme Leader. Are you ready for that?"[102] The answer quite simply, is no.

The third conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the United States government has little ability to *directly* influence the under-30 age group in Iran. Because of its

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[100] "Iran: What does Ahmadi-Nejad's Victory Mean?" 7.
[101] Daniel Brumberg, "Stalemate in Iran," *Hoover Digest*, No.2, 2002.
[102] "Iran: What does Ahmadi-Nejad's Victory Mean?" 15.

historical animosity with the United States, any attempt at official U.S. influence of any segment of the Iranian population is met with great resistance, and often ends up hurting the very organizations that are intended to benefit from U.S. assistance. This direct contact empowers the government, and makes it easier for them to justify further isolationist policies with respect to the United States. Going back to the Mossadegh affair of 1953, the U.S. support for the Shah of Iran in the 1960s and 1970s and the support for Saddam Hussein in the war with Iran, direct involvement with the United States carries too much "historical baggage" to be effective. Ken Pollack concurs, arguing "We cannot help the Iranian people directly because of our long, painful history and their psychological scars, but we can play an indirect role, as a reminder of what Iran might be if it were willing to move in a different direction."[103]

This notion of indirect influence leads to the fourth and final conclusion of this paper. The United States has an immense ability to influence the youth generation in Iran through is "soft power." This notion of "soft power" popularized by political scientist Joseph Nye, is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the traditional "hard power" typically used by the United States. Transferring the ideas of using soft power to influence the Iranian government's behavior espoused by LTC Mike Monson, it is possible to use this same soft power approach to influence the young generation in Iran.[104] Through selected programs the United States can further the already positive impressions this group generally has toward the United States. The important distinction in using these programs is that the United States government would have to be seen as a facilitator, rather than the initiator of such programs. For instance, encouraging the increase of satellite bandwidth for increased commercial satellite TV broadcasts in Farsi originating from Los Angeles would be one method of expanding U.S. influence in Iran. Study programs at American universities specifically for Iranian students, to include scholarship money, could be funded and

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[103] Pollack, 416.
[104] Michael Monson, *American Soft Power: An Innovative Approach to Neutralizing Iran's Growing Security Threat*, Air Command and Staff College, 2005.

run by individual universities to give the thousands of Iranian students who want to study in this country the opportunity to do so. Naturally, the United States would need to make it easier for young Iranians to obtain the necessary student visas to participate in such as program. Again in this example, the U.S. government would act as a facilitator of the program, rather than the director. Sports and performing arts exchanges are another example of relatively benign cultural contacts that could shape the impressions of post-Khomeini born Iranians.

Leverage Points

This discussion of soft power approaches to influencing the younger generation in Iran leads to the discovery of natural leverage points the United States can target in influencing the under-30 demographic. These "soft power" leverage points fall into three specific categories: media, economics, and education.

Using the first leverage point, media, the United States can take advantage of the Iranian youth appetite for popular music, American films and satellite TV entertainment. Taking advantage of the large Iranian expatriate population in southern California, which happens to be the recognized center of the world's entertainment industry, it should be easy to capitalize on commercial resources to create media programming of all forms that create a positive image of the west (and the United States in particular). This media can then be delivered via satellite, the Internet or other commercial avenues. The goal of this media delivery would be to subtlety promote the types of social and economic reform the younger generation in Iran desires.

The second leverage point, economics, requires the United States to drop most of the existing economic sanctions and allow American firms to conduct business in Iran. Exposure to American companies and business practices will increase the positive image of America to many young Iranians because, in a sense, it will put America within reach. Instead of just seeing the United States on TV or the Internet, they will be able to "buy" America. Shopping, buying and engaging in business with Americans has another advantage. Many young Iranians could

potentially be employed by these same American companies. What better way to influence the upcoming generation of Iranian youth.

The third and final leverage point, education, consists of a robust program of student immigration and educational programs in the United States geared toward young Iranians. A liberal student visa policy for Iranian youth could have one of two effects on Iran, both positive from the United States perspective. First, large numbers of students coming to the U.S. from Iran to study could rapidly accelerate the "brain drain" phenomena and force the government to institute more liberal social and economic policy changes to staunch the flow of students. The second possibility is that a large influx of U.S.-educated Iranians returning to Iran could affect change from within the country, albeit over a prolonged period of time. Either way, it is hard to argue that giving more young Iranians the chance to study in this country is a bad thing. Secretary Condoleeza Rice and the U.S. State Department seem to have reached the same conclusion. Appearing before several Congressional committees Secretary Rice recently asked for an additional $75 million for programs to promote democracy in Iran.   Part of this increased funding request would go toward bringing young Iranians here to study in the United States.[105]

Probability of Conflict

Given the conclusions that the majority of young Iranians have given up on near-term political reform, that the theocracy controls the key levers of power in Iran, and that the United States has little ability to directly influence the youth movement in Iran because of historical precedent and government resistance to U.S. interference in Iranian affairs, it is apparent that the probability of political conflict leading to regime change is Iran is extremely low.

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[105] www.cbsnews.com. "Infiltrating Iran," 17 February, 2006.

SUMMARY

The thesis question of this paper can now be answered. Does the generation of Iranians born after the 1979 revolution wish to continue living under the system established by Ayatollah Khomeini, or do they wish to modernize (or perhaps westernize) their current political, social, and economic systems? The answer is that this young generation of Iranians does desire change in all three systems, but currently, the desire for economic and social change has outdistanced the desire for political change in the near term. Political change is seen as a long-term effort.

This paper has examined the under-30 generation in Iran with respect to their attitudes and desires toward political, economic and social change. To begin the study, it was necessary to examine Iranian history and understand that Iran feels it has traditionally been oppressed by foreign powers. Furthermore, Iranian foreign affairs were often focused on attempts to balance regional hegemons such as Russia, the United Kingdom, and finally the United States and the Soviet Union. This paper then examined the political structure in Iran, analyzing the relationships between the main actors in the Iranian executive, legislative and judicial branches. The examinations revealed that the levers of power in Iran are clearly controlled by the Supreme Leader and the ruling cleric class, and that the legislative branch, consisting of the President and the Majlis, is unable to check and balance the power of the other branches.

The paper then examined how the youth generation in Iran felt (attitudes) about the current Iranian political, economic and social systems, and how they wanted (desires) these systems to change. Potential government reactions to calls for political, social, and economic change were also discussed. Possible areas of compromise between the government and the youth of Iran on policy changes were examined. Adoption of the "China" model, where the government allows more economic and social freedom in return for reduced political activism was proposed as an acceptable compromise between the youth generation and the government of Iran.

Finally, four broad conclusions are enumerated. The first conclusion is that the under-30 generation has subordinated their desire for political change to those of economic and social reform. This is mainly due to the ineffective Khatami Presidency and the government's reaction to the 1999 student demonstrations. The second conclusion was that any political change in Iran will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary, in part because of the conclusion above, but also because the current regime holds a grip on all the relevant sources of power in government. The third conclusion was that the United States has little ability to directly influence the youth generation because of the government's fervent anti-U.S. sentiment. Any direct U.S. contact with Iranian youth groups does more harm than good, because it is seen as meddling in Iranian internal affairs. Finally, the last conclusion is that the U.S. has immense potential to influence the post-Khomeini generation indirectly through our "soft power" capabilities. These soft power capabilities can be thought of as leverage points, and fall into the broad categories of the media, economics, and education. The paper concluded by predicting that the chance of conflict between the government and the youth generation in Iran leading to regime change was slim.

These conclusions and leverage points will hopefully serve as a starting point for future military planners who are called upon to conceive, draft and implement operations designed to influence the post-Khomeini generation in Iran. Ensuring that this group has a positive image of the United States and does not see America as an adversary will benefit not only U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but may provide leverage when dealing with the Iranian government on other global issues such as human rights and nuclear proliferation.

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