

# Obama's Iran policy doesn't have to fail

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The Washington Times, By Lord Archer and Bruce McCole: On Dec. 27, during one of Shi'ite Islam's holiest occasions, Ashura, millions of Iranians poured out onto the streets of Tehran and other Iranian cities, defying warnings and a brutal crackdown by the security forces, to call for the overthrow of the now increasingly vulnerable theocracy. Who could have thought that a theocratic regime like Tehran would murder its opponents in bright daylight on such a day?

Welcome to the Iran of today.

The Washington Times

He can embrace regime change

Lord Peter Archer and R. Bruce McCole

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The remarkable developments on Ashura showed that the harsh measures taken by the authorities during the previous protests have done little to intimidate the millions whose cry is freedom and who appear to be led by Iranian women. Their message to the outside world has been loud and clear: 'We will not give in to the regime that easily, and neither should you.'

The question now is what Europe and the United States are going to do?

Let's face it: the choice of the international community on both sides of the Atlantic on Iran is clear: To stand with the oppressors or the oppressed.

That being said, there should be no doubt that Europe and United States are entitled to march to the tune of their own interests. Last year at this time, the international community was eagerly hoping for a new U.S. president. His message was engagement.

President Obama genuinely hoped that a strong diplomatic overture to the Iranian leadership could, in the end, convince them to give up their nuclear weapons program. America's European allies clung on to that hope for a long time. But, not only has Iran refused to desist, it has now taken steps to expand its program tenfold.

Why? The answer lies not so much in our intentions but in the Iranian leadership's strategic calculations inspired by profound domestic threats. Recently, in an unprecedented act, young Iranians burned photos of the Iranian regime's founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and walked on his life-sized portraits in Tehran. "Death to Khamenei" (Ayatollah Ali Khamenei) is now the leading slogan in Iranian streets, as the activists are protesting against the entire system, not only the fraudulent election. Such actions brought the spontaneous street protesters more in line with the main Iranian opposition group, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (PMOI), which had long questioned the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic.

That is why as Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei desperately needs nuclear weapons to guarantee the regime's permanence in the face of mounting protests.

To achieve that goal, the ayatollah uses negotiations to buy more time for his nuclear program. Clearly, further concessions to Tehran would not only be construed as weakness by Iran's rulers but would also empower them. It would enable them to fund their terrorist activities, speed up their nuclear program, and consolidate power by cracking down on dissent. This is extremely perilous for the interests of America and its allies on the other side of the Atlantic.

Nevertheless the United States cannot engage in a military conflict with Iran, the risks of which would far outweigh its benefits. Instead, America and Europe should reach out to millions of Iranians who seek democratic change, a nuclear-free Iran, and a peaceful nation. This is where our interests converge with the Iranian people's democratic aspirations.

As a practical step on this track, the United States should lift the terrorist designation of Iran's principle opposition group. The Mujahedin-e Khalq was listed by the State Department as a "terrorist" entity in 1997 as a goodwill gesture to the Iranian government. Britain and Europe followed America's lead in listing the PMOI but were forced to reverse their decisions on the orders of their highest courts. These courts reviewed all the evidence pertaining to the PMOI and concluded that there is not a shred of evidence linking the organization to terrorism.

The terrorist designation of the group, however, was incredibly controversial to the extent that in the final days of the Bush administration, even the State Department's top counterterrorism official, Dell Dailey, strongly advised the department to undo the blunder. He was overruled by then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, however, due to

political considerations.

There is also a humanitarian issue involved here. Both Iran and Iraq have used the PMOI's terrorist designation to crack down on its members and sympathizers. At least 11 were killed last summer when Iraqi security forces launched an attack on Camp Ashraf, PMOI's headquarters in Iraq. And in early January, the Iranian judiciary announced that it has charged five protesters whom it described as members of "the counterrevolutionary terrorist group," the PMOI, with Moharebeh (waging war on God), for taking part in antigovernment demonstrations on Ashura. Moharebeh, carries the automatic death penalty.

On Dec. 27, faced with chants of "death to the dictator," Iranian security forces and government officials retorted by shouting "death to the hypocrites," a prerogative term the regime uses to undermine the PMOI in Iran. If President Obama were to decide to issue an executive order to remove the unwarranted terrorist label from the PMOI, he would certainly grab Tehran's attention while demonstrating to the Iranian people that America would no longer block Iranian opposition groups from working to bring democracy to Iran. But, time is running out and Washington's options are severely limited.

Seeing a democratic Iran could and should be our New Year resolution.

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