



PERSPECTIVES

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The US Must Arm the Iranian Protesters

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Rhetorical support for the Iranian protesters in their quest for freedom is not enough. The US, with the help of its allies, including Israel, must work 24/7 to provide – at the most opportune moment – arms and the knowhow to use them to the protesters against the regime. The time to act will be when casualties of the regime can be identified as coming from a broad spectrum of the Iranian public.

Commentators and experts have lauded President Trump and US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley for their clear rhetorical support for the Iranian protesters in their quest for freedom. Some have urged the US to provide information platforms to the protesters to circumvent the blockage of new media by the authorities.

While this would be helpful, it is hardly sufficient. The US, with the help of its allies, including Israel, must work around the clock to provide arms and the knowhow to use them to the Iranian protesters.

It should be clear why this is the case. The Iranian regime is as ruthless as they come and will commit any kind of atrocity against the protesters if it believes itself to be in danger – indeed, even well short of such a threat. It would be utterly cynical and self-defeating were the US and others to encourage the protesters without planning how they can defend themselves and bring down the regime.

For arms to be effectively provided, protesters who can use them have to be identified and contacted, and supply networks have to be built. These must be tailored to meet the needs of a variegated group of people operating in different environments. Some will be engaged in urban warfare, others in hit-and-run ambushes on the country's roads and rail lines across the country, and still

others as hit squads to assassinate regime officials and security personnel in a bid to turn the hunters into the hunted.

In areas inhabited by minorities, such as the Kurds or the Arabs in the country's southwest, efforts should be expended to conduct guerrilla operations. Heating up the country's periphery, where these minorities live, will do much to reduce the heat on the urban fighters who will carry the brunt of the fighting in meeting the primary strategic goal of the armed conflict – taking over and maintaining their hold on Tehran.

These protesters-turned-freedom fighters will have to be given intelligence as well, which will impose the arduous task of making sure that both the arms and the intelligence flow to the genuine opposition rather than into the hands of state agents.

At some point, this aid will have to be buttressed by much tougher sanctions to the point of a blockade on the country's ports or flight zones. Such sanctions will no doubt impose tremendous hardship on the Iranian people, but will also drive home the point that the maintenance of the regime is untenable and the quicker it is removed the quicker there will be the relief. Such a realization will, one hopes, induce many to give aid and shelter to the fighters.

Planning and creating a rudimentary network to provide arms and intelligence should have started in 2009. If it was not begun then, it must begin now.

Creating a rebellion is all about coalition-building. A massive coalition of disparate groups brought down the Shah in 1978, and only a broad coalition of forces will bring down the ayatollahs today. Relying on the westernized, more secular upper middle class in the universities or the better neighborhoods of Tehran will not be sufficient.

Moving too early might alienate the conservative and nationalist majority and play into the hands of government propaganda. Moving too slowly will facilitate regime efforts to crush the opposition.

The time to act will be when casualties of the regime mount and can be identified as coming from a broad, urban to rural spectrum of the Iranian public, which will be likely to spur an equally variegated and broad public response of mourning and protest.

The US and its democratic allies face two dangers in treading this road – false moral qualms and the fear of failure.

There can be no qualms over these operations. Few entities in the past half-century have caused as much harm and pain as the ayatollah regime – against the hostages at the US embassy in Tehran; against the Marines whose barracks were bombed in Lebanon – the second biggest terror attack in US history after 9/11; and against the Jewish Center in Argentina and subsequently the Israeli embassy, both of which were targeted by Iranian terror. Iran is also responsible for the creation of Hezbollah, currently under investigation for running a billion dollar drug distribution ring. Removing the regime or even denting its power would be a boon to the region and the world.

Should doubts intrude, consider the prospect of this regime growing into a North Korean nuclear duplicate, with far greater resources and greater proximity to both the US and Europe.

The second form of remorse is over failure. The effort might fail, with bloody consequences for the opposition. But that failure would be only temporary. Just as this wave succeeded the one that surged a decade ago, another will follow.

The message must be that the regime of the ayatollahs is doomed. The cue is from Winston Churchill. Evil will be defeated.

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