



Welcome to the New Iran

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: While it is still too early to evaluate the effects of Operation Epic Fury/Roaring Lion in terms of the internal situation in Iran, it can be argued that the operation was the tipping point that took Iran from a strong theocracy to a weak dictatorship. Within this framework, we can talk about the crumbling of the idea of the rule of the clerics, segmentation of the regime's top echelon, the radicalization of its strategic approach towards the region, the increasing murderousness of the regime's repression of the population, and the economic aid to the regime's supporters at the expense of the general public – the last of which will move into a battle for survival resulting in less protest and more violence. Iran is a completely different country from the one we analyzed prior to the most recent conflict. It is now a country that contains both risks and ~~no less significant~~ opportunities ~~within itself~~ that require a completely new situational assessment and planning.

Deep change

Operation Epic Fury/Roaring Lion is not over, and significant developments may yet occur. Weeks to months will have to pass before the dust settles and we will be able to see in which directions Iran is moving. What we can do at this point is set out initial questions, directions for thinking, and ideas about the implications.

What can be said with some certainty is that for the most part, that which once constituted Iran no longer exists, and the systems – both within Iran and external to it – must adapt to a “New Iran”. One can argue that the operation tipped Iran from a strong theocracy to a weak dictatorship. This process has

been going on for at least two decades, but the operation caused an irreversible change.

What are the expressions of the change?

First, the regime's approach:

- a. **The crumbling of the idea of the rule of the clerics ('Vilayat e-Faqih'):** The first generation of religious leaders (founder Khomeini and number two Montazeri) and the senior leaders of the second generation (Rafsanjani, Khatami and others) showed a nuanced approach to the idea of a connection between religion and government. Religion is based on the faith of the masses, so it was important to them that the regime enjoy popular legitimacy. Ali Khamenei, who could be characterized as a bureaucrat with an extreme interpretation of religion, gradually moved away from this approach, culminating in the blatant falsification of the results of the 2009 elections. His son, Mojtaba, no longer has anything to offer in terms of the faith of the masses. Hassan Khomeini might have been able to do this, but his pushing aside indicates that the senior leaders of the regime have lost the desire to establish even a semblance of broad faith in the idea. This means the government in Iran is now autocratic and dictatorial in the deep ideological sense.
- b. **Undermining the cohesion of the regime's top echelon:** The experienced Ali Khamenei positioned himself between the factions and approached the equilibrium point of the regime's top echelon. He was, accordingly, largely able to contain differences of opinion and coerce internal opposition. His death created a vacuum in which it is difficult to perceive a figure or group of figures from the regime who can bridge the gap. Top figures are needed who can both conduct dialogue with all the elements and impose their authority. There is a need to close ranks in the face of internal and external threats, but the ability to do so by consensus has been significantly reduced.
- c. **Strengthening the status of the IRGC:** The growing need for both violent internal repression and dealing with external threats further strengthens the centrality of the IRGC in decision-making. A key implication of this is the expansion of the use of military tools over civilian and economic ones in the management of state affairs.
- d. **Transition to the next generation:** The assassinations of the regime's top figures mark a transition from a generation shaped by the Iran-Iraq War to a generation whose main concerns are internal repression and strategic capacity-building, but who used them sparingly until April 2024. The formative war experience of this generation is Rising Lion/Epic

Fury/Roaring Lion. The reference point for their response will be an advanced Western fire threat combined with internal subversion that threatens the core of the state and the regime. This means they will be required to break away from old fixations and formulate an updated security doctrine.

- e. **The murderousness of the oppression of the people:** To preserve the appearance of popular legitimacy, the regime developed a complex concept of repression that preferred hidden violence over openly murderous ~~and open~~ action. The silk gloves that wrapped the iron fists were finally removed during the suppression of the demonstrations in January 2026. The damage to the regime's mechanisms of repression during Epic Fury accelerated the use of brutal ~~and~~ open violence.
- f. **The loss of economic support for regime supporters:** The damage to the Iranian economy and the regime's industries primarily harms its supporters. The regime will be forced to take action to maintain their support as their situation deteriorates. This means it will have to use the state's resources first and foremost to reestablish its power and core support base. This will come at the expense of most Iranian citizens and will seriously harm the prospects for a positive socioeconomic outlook.

Impact on the strategic approach:

- a. **The pursuit of unconventional weapons:** The existential threat to the regime, both personal and systemic, marks a turning point where religious and ethical barriers to the acquisition and even the use of unconventional weapons have been pushed aside. The working assumption should be that the acquisition process will now depend on technical capability – that is, technological feasibility and the ability to implement it without its being detected, attacked, and destroyed beforehand.
- b. **Regional use of force:** Until this conflict, ~~t~~The Iranian regime rarely attacked the countries of the region directly, preferring instead to use an indirect approach while hiding in plain sight behind its proxies. This mask was torn away as a result of existential threat, and may have been a deliberate decision. At the same time, Iran's military capabilities were severely damaged, and it was forced to switch to naval and aerial guerrilla methods to carry out its threats. Iran is likely to continue to use all the capabilities it can manage to mobilize in the region ~~in order~~ to extort its economic and security needs.
- c. **Updated regional strategy:** During the era of Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in early 2000, and through out the period of his successors, Iran operated according to a systematic regional

strategy of building a supportive coalition and weakening its rivals based on the recruiting narrative of the “Extermination of Israel”. The Iranians, who tried to realize their strategy in an orderly manner, were surprised by Hamas's move on October 7, which was carried out ahead of schedule on their timeline. Iran is now in a fight for internal and external survival and is using all means available to win that fight. We are now likely to see action based less on long-term planning and more in response to immediate evolving needs.

Impact on the public:

- a. **Regime supporters in an isolated bubble:** The survival and way of life of the members of the public who support the regime are highly dependent on the survival of the regime. At the same time, they are being fed lies about the state’s situation by the regime's media. It is likely that the hard core of the regime's supporters will support it much more brutally ~~and~~ on the basis of those false ideas, thereby distancing itself even further from the rest of the population. This means a strengthening of the regime's mechanisms of oppression.
- b. **The rest of the public is in a battle for survival:** The widespread damage to Iran's economy and the regime's need to rally its supporters and provide them with support will lead to a severe economic crisis among the general Iranian public. It is likely that a significant portion of the Iranian population will have to fight for their most basic needs. Most of the Iranian public will be preoccupied with their own survival.
- c. **Transition from protest to violence:** In a situation where most Iranian citizens are fighting for survival and brutal oppression is increasing, it is likely that ~~the~~ widespread and organized protests will decrease significantly while anger and willingness to commit violence will increase. We are therefore more likely to see anarchy and violence in the streets than orderly protests by large groups.
- d. **More autonomous conduct of minorities:** The severe economic crisis, the increasing brutal oppression, and their position as last among the regime's priorities will force minorities to increase their self-reliance and internal mutual aid. We are likely to see more autonomous activity by minorities than before, but it is questionable whether they will be willing or able to translate this into organized moves against the regime.

If the trends described above do materialize in Iran, then it is-will have become a completely different country from the one we have analyzed ~~so-thus~~ far - one that carries risks but that offers no less substantial opportunities:

- a. **Rebooting the assessment on Iran:** The vast knowledge and deep insights that exist about Iran must be reevaluated. We must break away from analytical continuity, distance ourselves from established constants, and examine the depth of change with a new perspective.
- b. **Promoting positive change in Iran:** The New Iran requires a completely different way of thinking about how to promote profound change within it. It is possible that some of the efforts made so far are no longer applicable, and their continuation would constitute a sunk cost.
- c. **This is not 1979:** The emerging reality makes the scenario of a revolution much less likely. It would be appropriate to break away from the “romantic” view of the 1979 experience as one likely to repeat itself.
- d. **The escalation of violence:** The emerging reality in Iran is likely to be much more violent for the Iranian public. The January massacre may prove to be only the beginning of much broader violence conducted by the regime. As the violence increases, it is critical to accelerate thinking about how to give the broader Iranian public the tools to protect itself and to find ways to support it.
- e. **The importance of sanctions:** As Iran's economic situation worsens, the sanctions will become much more effective. It is therefore essential to push for their continuity and prevent ideas that might arise to ease them in the name of misplaced concern for the Iranian people.
- f. **Response to capacity-building:** A much more vigilant approach will be needed to deny the Iranians the ability to develop their offensive capacity, especially their unconventional one, and use it in the region.

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