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**IRAN: Turmoil is More Hopeful than Order**

*Given the election-related turmoil in the Islamic Republic of Iran, can democracy ever take hold in a theocracy? How should the Obama administration respond to the disputed election and to Iran's ruling clerics?*

The Obama administration is rightly happy, though speaking judiciously, about the current improvement in Iran:*turmoil trumps tyranny*both in reining in its pretensions and in challenging its power. Says our President of the massive street demonstrations, "people want to see greater openness, greater democracy." "I stand strongly with the universal principle that peoples' voices should be heard and not repressed." Also rightly, Obama stands for a foreign policy of cool rhetoric, clear principles, consensus building, and courageous action. That is my answer to the second question.

The first question is harder and needs spelling out in light of the fact that in Iran what the centuries say to the years differs from what the years say to the days.

1.....Neither term means what it says. *Theocracy*says "God rules," but theocracies are priest-ruled. *Democracy* says "The people rule," but democracies are ruled by representatives of the people whose concerns and corruptions they share - corruptions compounded by the temptations of power.

2.....The maxim that "Democracy is the worst form of government except its alternatives" is a realistic commentary on human nature. While there are dangers to which liberty and equality give rise, the dangers in *the severe concentration of power*are greater. And the greater the implosion of power, the stronger the impending explosion into anarchy, then into freedom or - if the pendulum swings too far - into a new (and often greater) tyranny.

3.....Against the political monarchy of thirty years ago, Iranians took to the streets to demand an Islamic republic which would grant freedom to think and speak and write. What came of the collapse of the *political*monarchy was something even tighter, namely, a virtual *religious*monarchy ruled by mullahs through a "supreme leader" ayatollah fronted by a political-puppet "president" elected from a pool vetted by the "supreme leader." The unintended consequence of the revolution of '79 was the replacement of a secular monarchy by a theocracy Potemkin-clothed as a democracy, with even less of the basic human freedoms than the people had under their Cyrus-dreaming Shah Pahlevi, who had replaced the two-year Westernized secular democracy of Mossadeq (whom the mullahs saw as enemy, as did Britain and America after he appropriated the Anglo-American Oil Company, "nationalizing" oil). Given the declining age of the electorate, another try at secular democracy seems probable. I'm hopeful for a soon better distribution of power in Iran's evolution of government.

4.....In the West, government evolved through a conversation of Biblical and Enlightenment values and forces. Perhaps the earliest form of government was a dyad of shaman and warlord (roughly, "church+state"). Priestcraft (the province of the sacred) developed along with the emergence of kings from warlords and emperors from kings. In a triangular *separation of powers*, prophets arose to criticize the political and religious establishments in the name of the people's needs (including the need of basic human freedoms); and the political and religious authority-spheres came to be defined as both separate and interdependent (poorly phrased as "the separation of church and state"). Finally, the prophetic function of protecting the people from abuse by "state" and "church" was codified as the "rights" defined in the U.S.Constitution's First Amendment. / In developed societies, the three functionaries came to be called Prophet (claiming to speak for the peoples on the authority of sacred appointment),Priest (claiming the authority to lead all the people in celebration of the sacred), and King (claiming "the divine right" to rule the people). / The U.S. style of democracy has a further "separation of powers": in becoming only thePresident ("presiding" administrator), the king lost (toCongress) the power to legislate and to the Supreme Courtthe power to judge.

5.....In our double distribution of functions and separation of powers, the U.S. is the most evolved form of government. As is true of all evolutions, American democracy's shape and style has been and continues as a continuum of embattled copings with unique and changing circumstances. Religionists and secularists continue to make overclaims about our past. It is imperfect, fragile, and no more exportable than is fine wine. But Obama is correct: Its formative principles can serve as models to less evolved governments. In this perspective, the present turmoil in Iran is *more hopeful*than the order that has been breathing out hatred and threat to neighbors near (Israel) and far (America).

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  JUNE 19, 2009; 8:46 AM ETSAVE & SHARE:                       
PREVIOUS:**[**THEOCRACY OR DEMOCRACY? IRANIANS SHOULD DECIDE**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/susan_k_smith/2009/06/democracy_trumped_by_theocracy.html)**| NEXT:**[**WHAT OBAMA SHOULD SAY ABOUT IRAN'S ELECTION**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/feisal_abdul_rauf/2009/06/what_president_obama_should_say_about_iran_s_election.html)

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Of course, bear in mind that it was 'democracy' when they 'elected' the Ayatollahs and puppet ministers in the first place, all in the name of a Fundamentalist 'Godliness.'

They thought it'd be different cause it'd be \*their\* religion being the rulers. The 'Iranian Mind,' perhaps.

Didn't work out that way, did it?

Take warning.

**POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JUNE 22, 2009 4:37 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Those durn 'party-poopers,' eh, Reverend? ;)

**POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JUNE 22, 2009 4:30 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

In follow up,after review of the latest.

For me,
It's time to close my On faith experience.

Forgiveness, for the song.
When it don't Come Easy, Patty Griffin

DNR on the bridge,deserves a medal.

J

**POSTED BY: JAMES210 | JUNE 21, 2009 9:28 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Know,ledge often brings sorrow.

Voices heard...

What I find interesting is the Voices on our side. Those wanting to insert the US directly into the situation. Those probably experienced in these types of actions , though very high risk. Probably a redemption issue. With little chance of achieving anything.
Those wanting to play it safe, and sit back are probably just, based on their experience or lack of.

The Commander's decision, wise. In letting the situation go. Probability of success was less then the danger to his own country.

With regards to Kings, Prophets, Priests.
God makes men what they are. I don't think theirs a choice when God calls.

Three Kings- Aces Over.

J

**POSTED BY: JAMES210 | JUNE 20, 2009 8:46 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

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