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# Iranian Democratization Part II: The Green Movement - Revolution or Civil Rights Movement?

## **Author Biography**

Victor H. Sundquist is currently serving as a Lieutenant Colonel at the United States Army School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). He has served in the Armed Forces for more than 24 years both as an enlisted soldier in the 7th Infantry Division and as a commissioned officer in multiple worldwide units. He has deployed on missions throughout the world to include Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Operation NEW DAWN, and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. He has served as a Brigade G-2 for 1st Calvary's Military Transitional Teams in Northern Iraq, CENTCOM's LNO to the Department of State in Basra, and ISAF's Chief Theatre Security Officer in Afghanistan. He is a 1995 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and holds a Masters Degree from Henley-Putnam University.

## **Abstract**

The fundamental question of whether or not the Green Movement's opposition leaders were successful in their attempts to change the political landscape in Iran first lies in understanding the premise behind the organization and secondly recognizing the actual goals of the leadership. Consequently, this article analyzes these questions as a framework for developing a comparative analysis between revolutions and civil rights movements as a means to understand both the intent and outcomes of the Green Movement. From this analysis, lessons learned are put forth as a means to establish a series of recommendations for future Western political engagements with Iran. In doing so, the hope is that a political dialogue will emerge between Western governments that both alleviate the current tensions while also addressing security concerns in the region.

## Introduction

### *Framework of the Movement*

The question is often asked whether or not the Green Movement is considered a revolution or a civil rights movement? In order to adequately answer this question, one must first understand the dynamic framework of a revolution, as well as how that framework is used to control the revolution. To begin, a revolution is defined as an action meant to overthrow, repudiate, or thoroughly replace an established government or political system by the people governed.”<sup>1</sup> As noted in President Hojat al Islam Khamene’i’s discussion of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, several key elements exist within the framework of a revolution. They are: 1) The need for sound organizational structure, 2) An ideology and stated goal, 3) Qualified group leaders that can take advantage of each suppressed uprising and use it to develop the movement, 4) A charismatic visionary, and 5) The ability to organize people rapidly for the purpose of national strikes or protests intended to shut government operations down. Furthermore, revolutions require an initial purpose that ignites the movement whether in the form of a complaint against the government or the desire by a group to seek justice for inhuman actions. The reader was consequently taken through a brief history of Iranian democratization since 1906 in an attempt to lay the foundation for where the Green Movement fits into this revolutionary process.

### *Initial Purpose of the Movement*

The original intent of the Green Movement was simply to protest the fraudulent electoral process that caused Mousavi to lose to the incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a “landslide” victory. In essence, the population was angered by the fact that the government that claimed to be “of the people,” had so audaciously stolen an election and then stood by the results. In response to this government inaction, the movement quickly grew into a large-scale popular protest that directly attacked the political and social tactics of the regime leadership to include the Supreme Leader himself. From this aspect, the movement’s leaders were able to quickly tap into the underlying frustration that many Iranians felt about the increasing oppressive measures used by the religious leadership to control the population. Hence, the Green Movement possessed the initial purpose to organize.

### *Organizational Structure*

At first glance, the Green Movement seems to fit the mold for a modern day revolution, however, once each segment of the revolutionary framework is analyzed comparatively to the Green Movement, a different picture emerges. For instance, in comparison to the 1979 Islamic Revolution that had a well-defined and organized leadership core, the Green Movement lacked any clear organizational structure that would allow the group to identify and execute clearly stated goals regardless of government reactions. This caused the movement to fail to develop a robust network and a specific strategic vision that could be used to guide the unorganized population throughout the lifecycle of the uprising.

The movement as a whole also relied on ineffective tactics to counter security forces and their brutality in the streets. As an example, group leaders – in their effort to remain a “peaceful” movement – refused to spontaneously promote, organize, and execute rallies throughout the city. Instead, the leadership insisted on waiting for requested demonstration permits from the government that, in turn, would never arrive. Leaders were also unable to make the decision to become more aggressive at the demonstration sites when confronted by armed members of the Basij Militia or state security agents. From this angle, the decision to remain “law abiding” peaceful protesters was detrimental to the overall goal of invalidating the electoral vote or changing the constitutional structure of the current regime.

From a comparative perspective, the Ukrainian Orange Revolution – which saw very little violence – involved group leaders who were able to spontaneously shift their forces when needed in order to shut

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<sup>1</sup> Revolution. (n.d.), *Dictionary.com Unabridged*, May 18, 2012, available at: Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/revolution>.

down commercial and economic movement in the country.<sup>2</sup> If this had not occurred, the Orange Movement might have ultimately failed without shifting the movement's focus toward more violent approaches. On the other hand, the 1993 Russian Revolution is a modern example of the need to incorporate violence into the revolutionary cycle in order to force the hand of the government. For instance, the forced dissolution of parliament by President Boris Yeltsin on September 21, 1993 was not enough to convince the old Soviet Regime to change their political views.<sup>3</sup> The Russian population, in response, flooded the Moscow streets on October 4, 1993 resulting in violent clashes with security forces. When the dust settled, nearly 2000 Russians were dead and the Soviet Regime was effectively over.<sup>4</sup> In this case, Yeltsin was able to gain and maintain full control of the military enabling him to force his demands upon the existing government after resorting to a violent approach. Without the loyalty of the armed forces and the backing of the population, Yeltsin's endeavors would have ended quickly. In the case of the Green Movement, the leadership's inability to seize the moment and quickly organize an effective network led to the initial loss of control of the agenda, the people, and the situation ending in the movement stalling after a few months.

### *Group Ideology and Goals*

Unlike the 1979 Islamic Revolution where violence became an expected norm for the protesters, the Green Movement witnessed very little aggression from the demonstrators. This non-violent, utopian nature of the movement resulted directly in a lack of ideological structure in the organization as the initial anger of the population was driven mainly by electoral fraud and not from a deep-rooted desire to change the political regime. Even when national leaders like Khatami or Mousavi began to publicly emerge, linking themselves to the cause, the initial lack of ideological goals would force them to temper their political rhetoric. For instance, at no time during the early stages of the movement did any national figure or movement leader directly attack the concept of the *velayat-e-faqih* and its conflicting role in a democratic process.

As many Iranians consider the *velayat-e-faqih* as one of the root causes behind the tightening of the regime and the subsequent degradation of constitutional freedoms in the country, this lack of ideological alignment by the movement toward overturning this concept is stunning. In fact, former President Khatami would eventually call for a national dialogue on forgiveness in an attempt to bring his caustic platform back toward a moderate stance after the demonstrations subsided. Unfortunately, his attempts would be met with indifference from both sides as many felt he had turned his back on his original beliefs in order to save face with the Supreme Leader and the regime. In any case, the movement's lack of direct focus on building an ideological platform not only damaged its cause during the protests, but it has also damaged future endeavors to gain international support.

### *Qualified Group Leadership*

In order to be successful in building and sustaining any type of revolution, the group must have qualified leaders that are capable of visualizing the changing environment around them and then quickly adapting their organizational structure or processes to that situation. In the case of the Green Movement, leaders were either unable or unwilling to adapt to the situation at hand. For instance, when the security forces began using brute force against protesters, leaders did not plan nor adapt to the increasing violence. Although the state refused to recognize the peaceful intentions of the revolt and attack the protesters, the movement's leaders maintained their course of action enabling the national security forces to seize the initiative. In essence, qualified leaders must have an honest understanding of who they are. If their followers – the protesters in this case – do not have confidence or trust in their leadership, they will be uninspired and simply walk away. For this reason, to be successful as a qualified leader, you have to effectively convince your followers that you are worthy of their support. Furthermore, for any movement

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<sup>2</sup> Adrian Karatnycky, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, April 2005, available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/60620/adrian-karatnycky/ukraines-orange-revolution>.

<sup>3</sup> Shevtsova, Lilia, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), 79-85.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

or revolution to be successful, the population must inherently accept that their defiant stance is worth any personal or political costs incurred during the revolution. As noted in many past successful revolutions, this inspired direction does not always originate from mid-level leaders. Instead, the revolution's direction sometime comes from a central charismatic visionary who was able to inspire the movement's followers, as well as its local leaders.

### *Charismatic Visionary*

The 1979 Islamic Revolution had Ruhollah Khomeini as its charismatic visionary. Cuba had Fidel Castro and Argentine-born Che Guevara. Chinese Communists had Mao Tse-Tung. The Green Movement, in turn, did not have a dynamic charismatic visionary. The modern term "charisma" is derived from the Greek *kharizesthai* or "divine favor."<sup>5</sup> In ancient times, a person identified with "charisma" was considered to be in good standing with the gods. More importantly, charismatic leaders were seen as individuals who were able to represent the needs of their followers and were also able to undertake tedious administrative tasks. This type of person was further able to build broad-based coalitions in order to achieve the movement's goals. In Islamic tradition, charismatic leaders are seen as individuals with a supernatural calling and the innate ability for prophetic and spiritual knowledge.

When analyzing the leaders of the Green Movement using these identified traits, we find very little in common with known charismatic visionary leaders of the past. In fact, Mousavi, and Khatami displayed very little ability to energize their base to continue the revolution once the government turned their security forces on the protesters. Interestingly, Mousavi was originally allowed to continue his presidential campaign mainly because the Guardian Council did not feel he had the energetic personality to win the election in the first place. Hence, one of the leading factors inhibiting the Green Movement was its lack of a focus on a beloved figure, like Khomeini in 1979. In turn, this lack of vision and "grand" guidance resulted in an unorganized and ill-directed revolt.

### *Ability to Organize People*

The last critical factor in successful revolutions is the ability to organize people, as well as the ability to quickly redirect the masses when the situation dictates change. As noted above, qualified leaders throughout the organization can effectively build suitable networks to accomplish these types of organizational skills. When merged with a dynamic and charismatic leader, revolutions are born. The Green Movement leaders, in comparison, never developed this tactical skill during the demonstration period. In fact, the Iranian government effectively stifled many of the networking approaches, like social media, word of mouth, and attempted Friday prayer callings. Furthermore, Mousavi and others began to discuss a general strike within two weeks of the disputed presidential election of June 2009, but never actually announced one, as the government was able to mute the effort. The movement consequently was never able to materialize a widespread labor action.<sup>6</sup>

As noted by Mao Tse-tung, "a revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another."<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the historical events of the Green Movement as laid out earlier do not depict a revolutionary event as described by Mao. Rather, the actions of the movement are more in line with that of a public political discourse with underpinnings of constitutional or civil rights issues. In essence, the diplomatic and benign approach of the Green Movement's leaders never allowed for the concepts of Zedong to occur or the movement to progress to the next revolutionary level of action.

<sup>5</sup> Konstan, David, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Greek Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2006), 163.

<sup>6</sup> Kurzman, Charles. (2012). "The Arab Spring: Ideals of the Iranian Green Movement, Methods of the Iranian Revolution," *International Journal Middle East Studies* 44 (2012): 162-165.

<sup>7</sup> Mao Zedong [Mao Tse-tung], Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan, March 1927, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, vol. I* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), 23-29.

## Barriers to Success for the Green Movement

Although many analysts around the world firmly believe that the Green Movement did not succeed in its stated goals, the fact is that the movement has not entirely failed either. The Green Movement, instead, has encountered several social (religious), economic, and political barriers preventing it from blossoming into a formal revolution. These barriers include the initial debate over whether or not to connect the movement to Islamic ideals, the inability to effectively incorporate national labor organizations (bazaars) into the movement's cause, and the movement's focus on a politically non-violent approach.

### *Religious Barrier*

The first of these barriers – linking Islamic ideals to the movement – reinforces the very essence of the theocracy's legitimacy. For instance, religious leaders have historically played a key role in Iranian revolutions dating back to the 1906 Constitutional Revolution that saw the *ulama* act as the religious legitimacy for the movement. The 1979 Islamic Revolution would see the modern-day Supreme Leader and *ulama* clerics elevated to the center of the governmental structure. Hence, the religious aspect of revolutionary movements has been paramount to past movement successes. The legitimacy of the current Iranian regime, however, acted as one of the critical religious barriers of the Green Movement. For instance, with the exception of Khatami and to some extent, the deceased Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's support, the Green Movement did not have any real religiously-based backing. In fact, Neil MacFarquhar of the *New York Times* suggested that the Green Movement should employ "religious symbols and parables to portray themselves as pursuing the ideal of a 'just' Islamic state."<sup>8</sup> The Green Movement, however, was not religiously based, as the original dispute was not religious in nature. Rather, the Green Movement's foundation was driven by economic and political upheaval further exposed by a corrupt election process.

Although religious legitimacy was not instrumental to the development of the Green Movement, it was somewhat necessary in order to align the movement with Islamic principles and gain support from the broader population. Unfortunately, the Green Movement's leadership did not effectively make that connection with the population while the Supreme Leader was able to counter the revolt using the *velayat-e-faqih* and his platform as the Islamic ruler. Interestingly, Mousavi – in an attempt to build a grassroots organization after the demise of the Green Movement – established the Green Path of Hope as an official political group. In order to legitimize the party and align it with Islamic principles, Mousavi used the religious Islamic color green in the party's logo in order gain popular support and push the Ministry of Interior – who approved all political parties within Iran- to accept the legitimate nature of the organization.<sup>9</sup>

### *Economic Barrier*

From an economic standpoint, the Green Movement experienced several missteps in its efforts to adequately harness the public anger concerning economic conditions in the country. For instance, when Ahmadinejad initiated a "program to reduce subsidies for fuel, electricity and other basic goods," the population became enraged as the forty-dollar per month subsidy was negated by the country's spiraling inflationary rate.<sup>10</sup> An organized alliance between Iranian workers and Green Movement protesters, however, never materialized like they did in the later Arab Spring revolts. Much of this worker disengagement can be attributed to the lack of support by the *bazaaris* (mercantile and commercial interests – throughout Tehran, who demonstrated little interest in overthrowing the current system of government. In fact, many historians cannot relate the facts of the 1979 Islamic Revolution without

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<sup>8</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, "In Iran, Both Sides Seek to Carry Islam's Banner," *New York Times*, June 21, 2009, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/22/world/middleeast/22security.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Borzou Daragahi and Ramin Mostaghim, "Mousavi Forms New Political Front," *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 2009, available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/aug/16/world/fg-iran-mousavi16>.

<sup>10</sup> Kevan Harris, "Iran: Why Workers Aren't Joining the Protests," *Time*, February 22, 2011, available at: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2053157,00.html>.

discussing the bazaar support for the revolt.<sup>11</sup> Although Mousavi and other movement leaders would eventually call for national strikes, none would occur as the *bazaaris* never established an economic need to work with the Green Movement. In essence, common economic grievances can act as a bond between unlikely partners like the Green Movement and the *bazaaris*, however, unless the newly established Green Path of Hope organization is able to connect with the *bazaari* community and demonstrate a common goal, the future of the movement will continue to falter.

### *Political Barrier*

According to many analysts, the Green Movement's most glaring flaw was its commitment to a nonviolent civil resistance rather than a kinetic revolution.<sup>12</sup> Non-violent social movements, however, have a better track record over time than those of a violent nature. In fact, establishing a violent approach to the Green Revolution may have actually worked in the Iranian Regime's favor if implemented. The barrier to this concept, however, is that the Iranian Regime treated the movement protesters more like an insurgency than a constitutionally permitted public demonstration. Subsequently, the movement was not able to establish itself over a period of time as demonstrations were countered and dispersed quickly by security forces. Interestingly, the Regime's violent tendencies may have actually helped the movement's cause in the long-term as it not only demonstrated the Regime's fear of the non-violent approach by Green Movement protesters, but it also highlighted the lengths the government would go in order to maintain political control of the country. The government's violent response, in turn, leads many analysts to question whether the IRGC will step in to help the religious elite in the future knowing their extreme response to non-violent demonstrators in 2009. From this aspect, the political barrier for the new Green Path of Hope party is to establish itself as an economic and social opposition movement with the hopes for creating a future alliance with the senior leaders of the IRGC who may deem the current Islamic state as too violent and repressive.

### Success or Failure

From a revolutionary aspect, the Green Movement failed. This failure, however, is not due to internal organizational barriers or leadership mistakes. It is primarily because the Green Movement was not a revolution. As noted earlier, the Green Movement was initially a wide spread reaction to a corrupt electoral process that elicited angry emotions from Mousavi supporters who felt their candidate had been robbed of the presidency. Furthermore, the Green Movement did not possess all of the outlined requirements necessary for a revolution to exist. For instance, there was no well-defined organizational structure led by a qualified pool of networked leaders to advance the movement's cause. Instead, the initial public outcries to the electoral process were randomly redirected toward regime level political attacks without a specific reason for the shift causing the movement to falter in the face of Regime crackdowns.

What the Green Movement did represent was an emerging social and civil rights movement with a platform meant to address the disparities between the stated constitutional rights of the people and the political realities, as well as the deepening economic crisis that was blamed on the current leadership's policies. Assessed from this perspective, the Green Movement has not failed. Instead, the movement has morphed into new a political party, the Green Path of Hope. The future success or failure of this new party depends greatly on how the leadership defines the goals of the organization and how they subsequently implement them in the future. Hence, the Green Movement was then and is now an integral part of the ongoing democratization process of the Islamic Regime.

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<sup>11</sup> Staff Writer, "Iran's Wall Street: Whom Does the Bazaar Back," *Time*, August 03, 2009, available at: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1914298,00.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Karim Sadjadpour, Ramin Jahanbegloo and Robert Toscano, "Can Nonviolence Work in Iran," Interview with Ramin Jahanbegloo and Robert Toscano," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 18, 2011, available at: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/18/can\\_nonviolence\\_work\\_in\\_iran?page=0,0](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/18/can_nonviolence_work_in_iran?page=0,0).

Although its emergence was unexpected, the movement was able to force some type of self-assessment by the regime members. For example, over 100 members of the parliament have since signed a petition requesting the internal investigation into allegations that Ahmadinejad used state funds to purchase nine million votes.<sup>13</sup> This parliamentary action is clear evidence that regime leaders are worried about the underpinnings of the Green Movement and how they may affect the political process in the next presidential election. Hence, the movement has forced a political dialogue, but has not completely succeeded in advancing the democratic process in Iran. For this to occur, several factors must take place setting the foundation for a true democratic Islamic state to exist.

## The Future of the Movement and Democratization in Iran

The aftermath of the elections coupled with increased international pressure over the years has undoubtedly made the political situation in Iran fragile at best. In some political corners, calls have surfaced for a national referendum on the Constitution of the Islamic Republic while others have focused inwardly on picking the opposition candidate for the next presidential election. Although the debate concerning the democratization in Iran and the strategies to further the movement are as lively as ever, it is important to also recognize the immaturity and vulnerability of the process. It is highly unlikely that the selection of another high profile opposition candidate will help mobilize any significant support for the Green Movement in the future. The current disillusionment within the Movement's rank and file has consequently led to a regrouping phase in order to realign their ideological goals with a more refined economically and socially based platform. With the introduction of the Green Path of Hope Party into the political arena, the reformist movement is now better positioned to capitalize on future society-centered strategies designed to help break the current impasse with the regime.

Any future democratic reform strategy in Iran must combine a grassroots effort with religious/clerical and bazaari support for the reformist movement to succeed. Although a number of social, political, and economic factors made it possible for the Iranian regime to resist the Green Movement in 2009, the primary support base for the reformist still exists, albeit in a weakened state. More importantly, clerical support would aid the reformist movement, however, appealing to the Islamic community for legitimacy – as stated earlier – would give the Green Movement the moral authority to overcome structural barriers currently inhibiting the group's progress. Still, the possibility of democratic reforms in Iran moving forward depend heavily on internal and external factors that ultimately lead to several conceivable scenarios for the future shape of the Iranian government. These possible scenarios include the predatory and developmental states, and full democratization of the state. They are summarized below:

### *Predatory State*

The first possible outcome for the future of Iran is the concept of a *Predatory State*. As defined by Peter Evans, a predatory state exists when, 1) the political class has turned the rest of society into prey, 2) control of the state apparatus is held by a small group of personally connected individuals, and 3) the top classes destroy any possibility of rule-governed behavior through nepotism and plundering.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Iran, the possibility exists that the fragmented power structure will continue to consolidate in an effort to counter the reform movement's ongoing activities that essentially evolved because of the decentralized structure. In essence, the Supreme Leader, in an attempt to control the political process, continue to formulate a centralized power base similar to that of an authoritarian regime. One issue that surfaces with this theory is that the repressive nature of the current regime has effectively forced many of the conservative entities into shadow economic spheres similar to a Mafioso structure seen in American communities. This, in turn, makes it difficult for the regime to monopolize power or for the entities to act

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<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Sahimi, "24 Million = Zero: What the Greens Said Then, What the Hardliners Say Now," *Frontline Tehran* Bureau, June 7, 2011, available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/06/24-million-zero-what-the-greens-said-then-what-the-hardliners-say-now.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Evans, "Predatory, Developmental and other Apparatuses," *Sociological Forum*, (1989): 561-587, available at: [http://www.princeton.edu/wwac/academic-review/files/.../2.4\\_Evans.doc](http://www.princeton.edu/wwac/academic-review/files/.../2.4_Evans.doc).



like a bureaucracy if required. Hence, any consolidation of state apparatus would be forceful and under the guise of Islamic Law effectively making Iran an authoritarian theocracy.

### *Developmental State*

The second possible outcome is the evolution of a *Developmental or Bureaucratic State*. This type of state is defined when, “individual maximization takes place via conformity to bureaucratic rules rather than exploitation of individual opportunities presented as personal favors.”<sup>15</sup> In the case of Iran, this possibility – although unlikely under the current regime – could occur if the state pursued a Khatami moderate-style diplomacy push with the international community, as well as pursuing domestic economic reforms to balance the current status quo. Of course, this approach would require a détente to exist between the current regime and the international community in regards to the nuclear standoff. As this is unlikely under the Ahmandinejad regime, this course of action is less likely to occur in the near term. Hence, this reform approach would depend greatly on, 1) a more moderate governing regime, 2) a willingness by the religious elite to rationalize or reestablish economic ties with the West, and 3) the ability of the shadow conservatives to act and lead like a bureaucratic state and not like a Mafia family.

### *Full Democratization of the State*

The third possible outcome is the *Full Democratization of the State*. This evolution is ultimately the most difficult to achieve as the State itself would have to go through a full democratization of both the governmental institutions and its civil society.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, for this process to occur there would have to be a split between the religious ruling class and the bureaucratic management class – a separation of Islam (Church) and State. As the State and its governing constitution are currently linked to Islamic rule and the *velayat-e-faqih*, this avenue is less likely. The theory, however, is feasible given that the reform movement is able to successfully link economic, political, and social conditions to the Green Path of Hope’s party agenda and to the lack of successful leadership by the Islamic State. Unfortunately, given the current regime’s past evidence of using force to control the population, this avenue would most likely result in a true revolutionary and violent push unless the concept was forced from a future Supreme Leader who decided to decouple the institutions himself and restore the constitutional framework in Iranian society.

## Lessons Learned

### *The Truth About the Movement*

The Green Movement was and still is part of an enduring democratic process that is continuing to develop not only in Iran, but also across the broader Middle Eastern region. Furthermore, the original intent of the reform push was not to overthrow the current Islamic regime as the Western media so eloquently reported. Instead, the movement represented an Iranian population that wished to wrest the presidency and subsequent executive power away from neoconservative hard-liners for their economic incompetence, foreign policy failures, and ideological dogma, which limited their civil rights. The fact is, the Iranian constitution gives predominance to Sharia Law, but also incorporates into its framework the will of the people and their sovereignty. This very aspect of the Iranian constitution represents one of the core arguments of the Green Movement and their political platform. What will enable the reform movement to continue its process, however, is not personal liberty complaints, but the ability of the leaders to link the deteriorating economic and international diplomatic situation to that of the inability of the Islamic government to lead.

The current Iranian government has spent years basing its international reputation on the righteousness of the Islamic ideals and its ability to counter corrupt governments in the region. Yet, the Iranian government’s violent reaction to reform movement protests in 2009 has steadily chipped away at the legitimacy of the Islamic regime. Accordingly, the Green Movement’s future success depends largely on

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

the group's ability to emphasize the need for political reform within the constraints of the constitutional framework and religious protocols. There is a sizeable and sophisticated middle class with a high literacy rate that firmly believes in both the ideals of equality and religious freedom; however, recent events in the Middle East have given them more reason to openly question their governmental practices. Hence, the truth of the Green Movement is two-fold.

First, the reform movement has not failed, as it was not a singular event in Iranian history or an organic revolution meant to establish a change in government. It is instead part of a long-term evolving democratization process that is currently in a dormant and transitional phase. The will of the people still exists throughout the country, but a few religious ruling elites continue to stifle their voices. As noted throughout the world, liberal and democratic ideas have triumphed within civil society over time. The Iranian regime understands this and fears this process as it represents an eventual decline of their authoritative power.

Second, the Green Movement continues to morph into a political party and the group's leadership is still actively retooling their ideological agenda in order to align and link their civil rights reformist concepts with the current economic issues facing the country. More importantly, these issues involve the idea of rebuilding international support in order to re-establish economic and diplomatic communication in the future. The reform movement is an integral part of this process whether the Islamic leadership likes it or not as the very foundation of the reformist agenda directly links to the establishment itself. The fact is, Iran cannot go it alone in the world and succeed as a regional power. The regime, with the help of the reformist platform, must address critical economic and political issues affecting the country or it will face an actual revolt in the future meant to change one political system for another. Western governments, in turn, must understand this dynamic and subsequently determine the best diplomatic approach to dealing with the Iranian Regime while simultaneously pushing democratic reforms.

## Western Approach in the Future

### *Understand Your Place and be a Mentor*

It is naïve to think that Iran along with the Middle East is not going through a form of democratization or reformation process. The proper question is how does the West formally interact with these regional movements without impeding their progress or severing future diplomatic relations with any new government or process that emerges. The proposed answer is a dichotomy at best. For instance, Western governments must first understand that they are not the world's experts on democracies, nor are they in a position to dictate terms to other nations. Instead, the West must act as a mentor using smart power tactics that quietly instructs the reform movements on the pros and cons of different scenarios and allows these movements to grow and flourish on their own. In many instances, Western governments try to overlay a "Western template" onto a society that is simply not able to comprehend or accept its value system or way of life.

### *Not all Democracies are the Same*

Most Middle Eastern nations, including Iran, have evolved under a different civil code and religious structure that does not always relate to Western ideals or norms. This does not mean that these same nations are incapable of being democratic; rather it means that their form of democracy is slightly different than Western democracies. The basis of these blossoming democracies, however, is no different than the initial days of any Western democracy. The building blocks of democracy – human rights, freedom of speech/religion, and right to privacy – are the same regardless of cultural norms and are identified in the 1906 and 1979 Iranian constitutions. Furthermore, diplomatic prodding by Western democracies is not welcomed as it elicits the perception of foreign interference in internal national issues.

### *Quiet Diplomacy*

Obversely, Western governments need to stay focused on these movements and the developing democratic trends in order to ensure Western economic and security interests are protected during the

development process. Thus, “smart diplomacy” is a must in order to maintain open communication channels and not upset other regional or world powers. The situation is no different than the parent quietly watching over a child while the child learns to ride a bike; there is a need to help during the learning process, but there is also a need to step back and let the child fall and get up in order to try again alone. As the “beacon of light” Western governments, like the United States, need to demonstrate this type of diplomatic maturity by quietly teaching these emerging democratic governments the civil rights process while allowing them to make mistakes and learn a format that works for their society. Furthermore, they must realize that the final “democratic model” may not look the same, but still work for their people just the same.

### *Firm but Fair (Track II Diplomacy)*

Although the current Islamic regime chooses to isolate itself from the West and most of the Middle East, their diplomatic situation and need for international acceptance is no different than other countries. As stated by the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, “[d]emocratization in the Middle East is an outcome that must be attained. Therefore, the question is not whether such democratization is possible, but instead how to meet the yearning of the masses in the Middle East for democracy; in other words, how to achieve democratization in the Middle East.”<sup>17</sup> As noted, it is the responsibility of the world’s democratic nations to work with these blossoming democratic movements in order to determine how to best meet their needs. Two possible approaches to this developing democratic process is the use of Track I and II diplomacy either independently or simultaneously (multi-tracked). Track I diplomacy is defined as direct overt government-to-government interaction on an official diplomatic level.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Track II Diplomacy is defined as the “unofficial” interaction between nations that is usually carried out by a non-government actor with access to all decision makers.<sup>19</sup> In the case of Iran, development of open diplomatic relations will take time and will involve a changing of the guard in the next election before future direct diplomatic (Track I Diplomacy) efforts can be attempted.

In the meantime, the West needs to continue Track II Diplomacy in order to maintain open and private communication channels with the Iranian regime. Track II Diplomacy was expanded during the Khatami Administration from 1997 to 2005 and provided informal communication between the nations in order to discuss sensitive issues that each country was not ready to openly acknowledge. Some of these informal meetings can occur during sidebar opportunities at international business forums or working groups on local university campuses, as well as in normal United Nation settings. Examples of past Track II Diplomacy that led to formal diplomatic connections include the Dartmouth Conference after the 1959 diplomatic breakdown between Presidents Eisenhower and Khrushchev, the current efforts that are focused on North Korea, and informal discussions relating to the status of Kashmir and nuclear proliferation in the India/Pakistan region.

Although past U.S.-Iran Track II Diplomacy efforts have soured – mainly because the Ahmadinejad regime accused U.S. diplomats of subversion – future efforts can be restarted. These efforts, however, need to occur from both a position of power, and also mutual respect. For instance, the Iranians are well aware of the fact that the United States is a superpower, but they are also a historically proud nation and desire negotiations from a standpoint of equals. Hence, to accomplish this feat, reform-minded diplomats, policy advisors, and esteemed scholars should make up the core of these private diplomatic teams from each nation. The communication efforts should be cordial, yet instructive on both sides of the table – negating personal feelings and past biases. The bottom line to the problem is that both countries need to

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<sup>17</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdogan, “Democracy in the Middle East, Pluralism in Europe,” *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, January 30, 2003, available at: <http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/8/erdogan-democracy-in-the-middle-east-pluralism-in-europe-turkish-view-.html>.

<sup>18</sup> “Understanding differences; Acting on commonalities,” *Search for Common Ground: Commonly Used Terms*, April 12, 2012, available at: [http://www.sfcg.org/resources/resources\\_terms.html](http://www.sfcg.org/resources/resources_terms.html).

<sup>19</sup> Charles Homans, “Track II Diplomacy: A Short History - How the left-field idea of diplomacy without diplomats became an essential tool of statecraft,” *Foreign Policy*, August 2011, available at: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/20/track\\_ii\\_diplomacy](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/20/track_ii_diplomacy).

realize that each side has formal complaints that need resolution in order to build trust between the nations.

### *The “800 Pound Gorilla” – Nukes vs. Democratization*

One of the first steps to “building trust” between Iran and the West requires assurances on security related issues in the region – including Israel, Iraq, and Afghanistan – that can, in turn, be verified. For instance, Iran needs to be seen as a regional power and an international equal in the broader world community, as well as economic assurances that will help restart the country’s stumbling economy. The United States, on the other hand, requires assurances that Iran’s political, economic, and military intentions do not involve the destruction of Israel and the unbalancing of power in the region. With this Western requirement for stability, the “800 Pound Gorilla” in the form of Iran’s nuclear ambition enters into the formal discussion as related to the future of the Green Movement.

Although the development of nuclear technology in Iran has monopolized the international diplomatic channels in recent years, the issue is not so clearly defined to ordinary Iranians. For instance, civil rights issues surrounding the electoral process in Iran have become primary points of contention throughout the population since 2009, yet the development of nuclear technology is considered by a majority of Iranians as a sovereign right. Unfortunately, the Western perception that Iran is attempting to weaponize their uranium stockpile creates potential problems for the Green Movement and the group’s ability to direct momentum away from the international discussion and toward the current internal economic-related issues. In other words, the harder the West presses the Iranian regime on the nuclear issue; the more the government counters the aggression causing the population to “rally around the flag” subsequently strengthening the legitimacy of the neoconservative government and their hardline policies. As noted in a 2010 British Parliamentary meeting, Saba Sadeq, head of the British Broadcasting Corporation Persia service, stated that, “both sides are exaggerating Iran’s nuclear capacity for their own motives.”<sup>20</sup> He further stated that any type of foreign intervention “in any shape or form” would harm Iran’s democratic movement.<sup>21</sup> Hence, this political posturing by both sides not only increases both internal and external diplomatic tensions, but it ultimately drowns out the reform movement’s pro-democracy voices. Hence, the main losers in this nuclear tête-à-tête are the reformist party members who are desperately attempting to redefine the political message as one that centers on the economic and civil rights failures of the current regime and not one that involves a specific fight with the West.

From this point of view, the nuclear issue is a significant stumbling block for the reformist movement, as well as a decisive threat to the West and the balance of power in the region. The best approach to dealing with this issue is found in the old Russian proverb, “doveriai, no proveriai” or as President Ronald Reagan often stated, “trust, but verify” when dealing politically and militarily with other nations. For instance, when applying this diplomatic concept to the Iranian nuclear issue, leaders are able to fulfill this “trust building” capability while also creating an environment that reformist ideas can survive in. From this angle, understanding the effects of Western rhetoric in this diplomatic dance is extremely important to creating an environment that is suitable for Green Movement ideological expansion.

Ultimately, stability in the region is the goal of all parties involved, yet each nation’s idea of stability differs. The West, to include the United States, needs to understand this disparity when approaching Iran and their views of national sovereignty linked to the nuclear issue. The concept is no different than that of a cornered dog eventually striking out in an attempt to re-establish supremacy over the perceived aggressor. In the case of Iran, the more the West postures militarily and economically in the region the more both the population and the government feel cornered leading to irrational decisions that may upset the regional balance of power. In all of this external “chatter,” the true internal dilemma of fixing the economic and civil rights issues in the country, as championed by the Green Movement, is muted.

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<sup>20</sup> Stefan Simanowitz, “Four good reasons not to intervene in Iran,” *Prospect*, July 22, 2010, available at: <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2010/07/four-good-reasons-not-to-intervene-in-iran/>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Although the current Iranian regime may not be willing to take a more measured diplomatic approach in regards to its nuclear development, the United States still needs to be prepared to deal openly and honestly with the situation regardless of the regime's political rhetoric. The ultimate goal is to create a military and political environment that not only maintains stability in the region, but also indirectly enables the pro-democratic movements to take root and flourish throughout Iran. Consequently, the West's diplomatic and military advances toward Iran need to be calculated in order to account for the cause and effects of any perceived aggression. Nowhere is this more important, than in the increased tension between Israel and Iran. Furthermore, the possibility of Iran becoming a regional player is very real, however, creating the situation that allows the neoconservative regime to dictate future policies is concerning at best. For this reason, approaching the nuclear issue with calm rational diplomacy is a far better mechanism than launching military strikes with the intention of destroying nuclear capabilities or producing regime change. In other words, the Iranian population is quite capable of correcting internal political, economic, and civil rights disparities as long as they do not feel that external forces are the direct cause of their problems. In essence, the reformist movement requires a subtle international diplomatic approach toward the "800 Pound Gorilla" and the current Iranian regime in order to consolidate internal political power that will subsequently lead to a more stable political process in the country.

## Conclusion

A colleague once asked why the Iranian Green Movement failed. At the time, an answer to this question was elusive despite years of intelligence expertise in that region. Accordingly, a long educational journey emerged in order to answer this question and highlight the historical democratic process in Iran, as well as how the events of 2009 played into this evolution. Although a lengthy history has been laid in both parts I and II of the democratization of Iran, it is one that needed to be told in order to fully understand why the Green Movement evolved and where it is going in the future.

The inherent truth about Iran is that its people desire civil liberties and personal freedoms as much as any other population in the world. They desire security and the knowledge that their children will live in a country that is better than what they experienced. Accordingly, an attempt was made to depict this human desire in the form of an evolving democratic process that is still developing despite the Iranian Regime's best efforts to prevent it. Hence, to answer the original question of why the Green Movement failed, the following answers or posited. First, the movement did not fail entirely as it was not a singular event in Iranian history and did not possess the technical requirements needed for a revolution. Furthermore, the leaders of the Green Movement did not intend to overthrow the existing regime or to establish a change in the religious dynamic of the ruling class. Rather, the movement initially represented a deep-rooted anger toward the corruption experienced during the 2009 presidential election. This anger was succeeded by a developing desire to address the current economic and social conditions within the country and to force the Supreme Leader to fix the system. Unfortunately, this did not occur, and the Iranian people experienced the true and violent nature of their beloved Islamic-based system.

From the standpoint of a developing reform movement, it is noted that the post-election protests revealed many weaknesses within the Green Movement's organizational structure that led to the government's ability to quell the demonstrations. Furthermore, the regime has been somewhat insulated from reform progress by its continued ability to use its existing resources from its oil industry. This, in turn, has enabled the government to maintain a certain level of economic stability within the country curtailing many of these social issues. With the added sanctions by the West in recent months, however, this ability will slowly diminish, opening the door for possible new calls for reform. When this occurs, the Green Movement's newly developed party – The Green Path of Hope – will need to be prepared organizationally and mentally to challenge the establishment.

The one area that the reformists currently have in their favor is that the Iranian regime has experienced a large international outcry over their violent reaction to the last protests. This will undoubtedly play into the decision-making process of both the government leaders, as well as the IRGC commanders who view their political status in Iran as crucial to their future role in any type of government. Change in Iran will eventually occur, however, the reform movement will need to overcome many of the earlier identified barriers. Of these identified barriers, the structural barriers of both the movement and the subsequent

reformist political party are the most urgent to address. This includes defining and fixing the hierarchal command and control structure of the movement and the party in order to better organize and address changes immediately when they surface. From this angle, the Green Path of Hope, with “quiet guidance” from the West can act as a catalyst for change in the country.

In a final thought, the recent Arab Spring movements – which were initially inspired by the Green Movement demonstrations – have now re-inspired the reformist movement in Iran to continue its effort in addressing economic and social disparities in the system.<sup>22</sup> Although the reformist movement does not hold de facto power in Iran, it is important to know that this situation can change in the next election and thus represents a legitimate alternative to the ruling elite. For this reason, the West needs to pay attention, be diplomatic, and be patient as the story is not yet over.

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Kurzman, “The Arab Spring: Ideals of the Iranian Green Movement, Methods of the Iranian Revolution,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44 (2012): 162-165.