

both systems were fundamentally unsecure. Instead of deploying secure systems, manufacturers lobbied for laws that would make it illegal to listen to the broadcasts. The results were predictable: dozens of cases in which radio transmissions were eavesdropped. We are now making similar mistakes in the prosecution of many Internet crimes, going after the perpetrator while refusing to acknowledge the liabilities of businesses that do not even take the most basic security precautions.

We should also bring back the Office of Technology Assessment, set up under a bill passed in 1972. The OTA didn't have the power to make laws or issue regulations, but it could publish reports on topics Congress asked it to study. Among other things, the OTA considered at length the trade-offs between law enforcement and civil liberties, and it also looked closely at issues of worker monitoring. In total, the OTA published 741 reports, 175

of which dealt directly with privacy issues, before it was killed in 1995 by the newly elected Republican-majority Congress.

Nearly forty years ago, Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* helped seed the US environmental movement. And to our credit, the silent spring that Carson foretold never came to be. *Silent Spring* was successful because it helped people to understand the insidious damage that pesticides were wreaking on the environment, and it helped our society and our planet to plot a course to a better future.

Today, technology is killing one of our most cherished freedoms. Whether you call this freedom the right to digital self-determination, the right to informational autonomy or simply the right to privacy, the shape of our future will be determined in large part by how we understand, and ultimately how we control or regulate, the threats to this freedom that we face today. ■

Letter From Iran

by Patrick Smith

In a gritty neighborhood of South Teheran not long ago, Iran's animated opposition movement gathered at a mosque to mark a grim occasion. It was November 23, a year since state security agents assassinated Dariush Foruhar, the longtime leader of an old, outlawed party of left-liberal nationalists. In the courtyard, pictures of Foruhar were wreathed in flowers. Koranic chants wafted over the crowd from the mosque's arched entrance. In the course of an overcast winter afternoon, several thousand mourners came, conversed and went. Outside the gates, the Islamic government's goons might as well have worn sandwich boards.

As snapshots go, this one is rich in revealing detail. The mosque is sanctuary in Iran; by tradition, not even the shah or the police could invade it. And it is in the inviolable space provided by the mosque that Iranians now gather to rethink a revolution that, after deposing the last shah in 1979, has put the mosque before all else. Across a sea of faces—some fresh from university dorms, some with fifty years of politics etched into them—you see mourning remade as anticipation. Foruhar and his wife died of stab wounds, the first in a wave of murders since traced to zealots in the Intelligence Ministry. And now, a year later, the mood is something close to jubilant. Killing Foruhar gave Iranians another image of themselves, another face to remind them of what they aspire to be.

On the eve of elections to the Majlis, as Iranians call their national assembly, this nation survives on a bittersweet diet of impatience and exhilaration. Since the stunning victory of President Mohammad Khatami three years ago, the desire for civil, social and political reform has been as evident as the snow-capped peaks that surround Teheran. But Khatami bears two decades of "political Islam" on his back. He lives in an all but un-

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workable *cohabitation*, as the French say, with a conservative majority in the Majlis and a hierarchy of orthodox ayatollahs whose powers supersede his own: divine law above civil law. The polls scheduled for February 18 will do little to alter the President's uneasy relations with the clerical establishment. But if Iranians elect a reformist majority, as they almost certainly will, Khatami and the "civil society" movement gathered behind him will have their first real chance to alter Iran.

There is far more than a new political equation at stake. What is the place of the clergy, and of the popular will, in the Islamic Republic's political structure? More specifically, where should power reside—in an elected legislature and the civil code it produces, or in religious authorities who preside above both? These are not easy questions—not in a nation that has given the ulema, the religious authorities, a place at the political table since 1500, and not now, when defenders of the Islamic Republic assert vigorously that they have resolved Iran's longstanding conundrums.

To his credit, Khatami has not only articulated these questions anew; he has encouraged Iranians to answer them through a kind of national reinvention. Reformists have been at work in Iran for more than a decade, long before Khatami's rise to prominence. But Khatami has given them direction and coherence. And in the elections this month, the inchoate process of reimagining Iran stands to be confirmed—implicitly, at least—as the nation's stated direction. "Iran is pregnant. We are expecting," says Ebrahim Yazdi, a reformist of many years' standing. "All the hustle and bustle, all the back and forth you see every day—these are the labor pains."

The labor pains have come frequently since Khatami assumed office in 1997. Orthodox ulema control the judiciary and maintain close ties with the police and security bureaucracies. Through these, they have engaged in a pitched guerrilla war with Iran's newly invigorated press, which has been essential to the advance



of reformist thinking [see Geneive Abdo, "Publish, Then Perish," November 29, 1999]. Along with journalists, publishers, students, reformist officials and others, an unknown number of liberal ayatollahs now languish in Evin prison, a gruesome sprawl in tony North Teheran that is left over from the era of the shahs. Notable among the incarcerated is Abdullah Nouri, who was Khatami's interior minister until the Majlis impeached him, and a newspaper publisher until he was jailed and his paper closed. Charged with heresy, Nouri began a five-year sentence late last year.

Nobody here is under any illusion that this month's elections will transform Iran overnight. Constitutional revision is essential if Iran is even to modify the concept of *velayat*, or religious guardianship. And however the elections turn out, rewriting the basic law will be no easier here than it would be anywhere else. Civil institutions are few and weak. The last shahs—the deposed Mohammed and his father, Reza—built few and destroyed many during their half-century in power, with the modest exception of those needed to keep the small, Westernized elite minimally content. Even the press, though its influence has been immensely positive, has little notion of disinterest: Papers function less as common social assets than as substitutes for political parties, which are banned.

The economy is in rough shape, too: Last year it contracted marginally, and will grow only modestly this year. Inflation, now at roughly 25 percent annually, is chronic; the rial, which traded at about 70 to the dollar before the revolution, now trades at almost 9,000 on the black market. Khatami has carefully—and wisely, one must conclude—made social and political reform his priority. Iran's oil and gas reserves have saved it from economic calamity, and the sanctions Washington continues to insist upon are crumbling; at this point they isolate the United States more than Iran. But the economy needs serious attention, particularly in view of Iran's extraordinary demographics: Three-quarters of its 60 million people are under 35, half are under 20. This is potentially a time bomb. Unemployment is already running at 20 percent.

Iran's youth, however, are more an asset than a liability. They have lent vitality and momentum to the reformist project. Indeed, after renewed student demonstrations last summer, Khatami must worry that however bloody his battles with the orthodox ulema, he will have trouble riding the tiger he has helped unleash if he fails to satisfy the younger generation's expectations. This reflects one of the revolution's larger ironies. For the majority of Iranians—poor, of traditional backgrounds and beliefs—its social impact has been unquestionably positive. Literacy has climbed sharply, for instance. And women have made some of the most striking gains: They are now prominent in the work force and an important political force. The university population, less than 25 percent women in 1979, is now 55 percent women. Another feature of postrevolutionary Iran is also at work: The nation's drift to the cities has been swift and without letup. At the moment of the revolution, the urban population tipped from 49 percent of the total to 51 percent; it is now approaching two-thirds. For the first time in history, a majority of Iranians have

never known the village mosque or sought the guidance of the local ulema.

Anticipating the elections, the conservative bloc in the Majlis has done much to manipulate the process. Not surprisingly, the conservatives began with the voting age: Last year they raised it from 15 to 16, which probably cost the reformist slate close to 1.5 million votes. The Guardian Council, a clerical body authorized to vet political slates on the basis of their Islamic credentials, went to work in January, disqualifying roughly 10 percent of the 6,700 candidates who intended to run for the 270-seat Majlis.

These measures have hobbled the opposition, and Khatami's caution in dealing with his adversaries is evident. Everyone in the reformist camp is forced to speak in code. But the price paid by the conservative ayatollahs is even greater. Iran is a nation of believers; the ulema have enjoyed close ties with the populace for centuries. It was because of their influence among ordinary Iranians that the clergy was able to consolidate its power in the years after the revolution. But by failing to register the many social changes, the ulema have lost the old connections.

This is a momentous break, and the numbers one hears confirm it: Assuming the elections are fair, reformist candidates stand to take at least the 70 percent of the vote that carried Khatami to power three years ago. In the major cities—Teheran, Isfahan, Shiraz and others—the figure could approach 100 percent. These estimates are consistent and credible. Iranians are not merely restless; they are also engaged. Spend an hour on any street in Teheran and it becomes perfectly clear that this is a nation that has gone far beyond the ideals of the revolution's remaining defenders.

Apparently mindful of their isolation, Teheran's hard-liners now appear to be seeking the strongest minority position they can get in the next Majlis. Yes, there's still plenty of talk of blasphemy and betrayal at the huge Friday prayer meeting in Teheran—always a reliable measure of the conservatives' latest concerns. And yes, the Guardian Council has eliminated some important political leaders. But the council chose its victims with unexpected caution; it even allowed some candidates back into the campaign by way of an appeals process. Elsewhere, the courts have begun to ameliorate some of their most provocative decisions. In mid-January, they reduced the sentence of two Teheran University students jailed last year after publishing a play that made light of Islamic tradition—a celebrated case. A few days later, supreme leader Ali Khamenei pardoned Gholamhossein Karbaschi, Teheran's popular, innovative mayor until he was jailed last year on concocted embezzlement charges.

It looks a lot like pre-election politics, but the implications are larger than that. The conservative consensus, which has held through twenty years of sanctions and an eight-year war with Iraq, is coming unwound. In effect, the Islamic revolution has come face to face with the contradiction at its core. Few here question the necessity of the revolution; nostalgia is limited to the affluent quarters of North Teheran, and even there it is generally accepted that the revolution was intended to give voice not to the mod-

Khatami will have trouble riding the tiger he has helped unleash if he fails to satisfy the younger generation's expectations.

ernized few but to the unmodern many. But therein lies the conundrum: The revolution gave Iranians a sense of identity they never had under the shahs, but identity begins with the individual. The revolutionaries set out to build a moral society, but morality always begins within the individual conscience.

The rule of law, an unfettered press, civic institutions, tolerance and social justice: These are the components of the reformist agenda. And the orthodox ulema might have frustrated every one of these aspirations if they were all the reformists had on the table. But Khatami and his supporters speak, above all, for a change in consciousness, and there is no turning back from that. At the core of the reformists' thinking is a transformation of the sacred space created by the revolution—Iran as a place of religious observance, as a mosque and its courtyard—to the public space of a modern nation. This is not only a matter of new parks, markets and modern housing—although these have been part of the reformist project in Teheran and other cities—but also of the construction of public space within, in people's heads. That is why newspapers have been the essential tools of the reformists. The endeavor is to redefine Iran by helping Iranians redefine themselves.

The igniting spark in this process does not derive from one figure or any group. After a century of top-down modernization strategies, it appears to come from deep within. Khatami, who is 56 and an intellectual of broad learning, is an original thinker. Like Havel, like Mandela, he is capable of breaking molds. It is a rare faculty among political figures of his prominence, and Khatami has used it to offer Iranians a new perspective on themselves and their place in the post-cold war world. For more than a century Iran has wandered between a worship of the West and its opposite, the vigorous xenophobia evident at the height of revolutionary fervor in the eighties. The missing ingredient has always been self-confidence, and this is Khatami's gift. He has broken the spell cast by the West, and with it the cycle of modern Iranian history: We know ourselves well enough to accept influences from the West without risking "Westoxicity," as Khatami puts it. And we are certain enough of our own traditions to avoid imprisoning ourselves within them. Khatami's message has changed the essential question posed by the revolution. "What does it mean to be Islamic?" has been transformed into "What does it mean to be Iranian?"

The answer to this—who Iranians will be—is not clear, and won't be anytime soon. Reformist thinkers say their full agendas must remain hidden for now—and in this they include Khatami's. This month's elections will almost certainly create the space within which Khatami and his followers can make more of their thinking known, but the political and social evolution they propose, they readily acknowledge, is the project of a generation.

Will Iran develop a secular democracy? It could: It had one briefly in the early fifties, under Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, before a US-inspired coup destroyed it, and the Mossadegh era is a universal point of reference among Iranians today. Will the country develop a wholly new relationship between church and state, a relationship that reflects Iran's history instead of the West's? That is possible, too. Iranians are prepared to engage such questions. Are we in the West? Without meaning to, Iranians raise that question, too. ■

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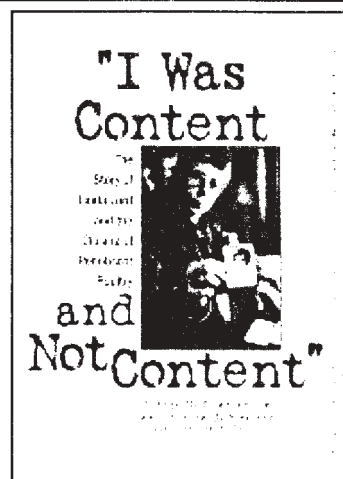
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