



# EUROPE'S FAILED POLICY TOWARDS IRAN

 *International Committee  
In Search of Justice*

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# Europe's Failed Policy Towards Iran

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International Committee in Search of Justice (ISJ) was initially formed in 2008 as an informal group of EU parliamentarians to seek justice for the Iranian democratic opposition. In 2014 it was registered as a non-profit NGO in Brussels expanding its membership beyond elected parliamentarians to former officials and other dignitaries with an interest to promote human rights, freedom, democracy, peace, and stability.

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## Executive Summary

The enduring failure of the West's policy of appeasement toward Iran necessitates a profound and strategic reappraisal. The West, particularly Europe, has for far too long pursued a course of engagement with Tehran, rooted in the misguided belief that dialogue and concessions could moderate the mullahs' menacing behavior. Yet, this approach has not only failed to achieve its objectives but has, in fact, emboldened the regime. Structurally resistant to genuine reform, Tehran has exploited this leniency to entrench its power, expand its influence across the Middle East, accelerate its nuclear weapons program, and suppress its own people with impunity.

The regime's intransigence is not a passing obstinacy but a fundamental trait. The only path to meaningful and lasting change lies in the complete overthrow of the decrepit theocracy, an outcome that can only be achieved by the Iranian people themselves, not a military conflict. Western policy has long overlooked the Iranian people and their organized resistance, a negligence that has come at a significant cost.

Critics of regime change contend that the collapse of the Iranian regime would trigger chaos reminiscent of the turmoil in Libya or Iraq. However, Iran is equipped with a well-organized and mature opposition, fully prepared to steer the nation through a peaceful and orderly transition. This is not a fragmented or nascent force but a cohesive and strategically minded movement, poised to lead Iran toward a stable, democratic, and secular state. The fall of the Tehran regime, therefore, need not descend into chaos but could instead signal the birth of a new, more prosperous era for the nation.

The geostrategic consequences of this transformation would reverberate well beyond Iran's borders. The regime serves as a central pillar in the axis of global destabilization alongside Russia and Venezuela. Turning Iran into a democracy would strike a decisive blow against this alliance, triggering ripple effects that would lead to a profound and favorable realignment of the international order.

A new policy approach must be anchored in resolute action, strategic pressure, and unwavering support for the Iranian people and their organized resistance. By adopting this course, the West can help orchestrate the peaceful demise of the mullahs' regime, paving the way for Iran's transition to a stable, democratic state. This outcome would not only uplift the Iranian people but also deliver a critical blow to the global axis of destabilization, thereby fostering a more secure and peaceful international order. The moment for decisive policy change is upon us, and it must be seized before the window of opportunity closes.



## Introduction

As global geopolitical dynamics evolve at a constantly more rapid pace, the persistence of a policy that has demonstrably failed for over four decades calls for an urgent re-evaluation. This paper seeks to analyze the European policy on Iran, prompted by a recognition that continued adherence to a flawed strategy is not only illogical but detrimental to both regional stability and European interests. As American writer Rita Mae Brown said, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results.”<sup>1</sup>

History has repeatedly shown that the Iranian regime is inherently incapable of meaningful reform. Only a complete overthrow, led by the Iranian people themselves, can pave the way for true and lasting positive change. The glaring omission in Western policy has been the neglect of the Iranian people and their organized resistance, which represent a force of immense strategic value.

Another crucial strategy for achieving this change is the international isolation of the ruling regime. Severing all diplomatic ties between the EU and Tehran, and expelling the regime's diplomats, would not only strip the mullahs of legitimacy but also embolden the Iranian people, whose desire for change is undeniable. Critics who foresee chaos akin to Libya or Iraq ignore Iran's unique social and political fabric. With a well-organized and mature opposition prepared to lead, Iran stands ready for a peaceful transition to a stable democracy, avoiding the pitfalls of those nations.

Furthermore, the geostrategic stakes cannot be overstated. The mullahs' regime is the linchpin of the Russia-Venezuela-Iran axis of global destabilization. Transforming Iran into a democracy would decisively weaken this alliance, leading to a profound and positive realignment of the international order.

Indeed, formulating an effective and multi-dimensional policy toward Iran is not a simple task, given the country's significant strategic importance in the region. Iran is not only one of the largest and most populated countries in the Middle East, but it also boasts a rich history of over 3,000 years of civilization. Throughout history, Iranian scientists and philosophers have made substantial contributions to the world, reinforcing the idea that Iran, regardless of its current ruling regime, cannot be simply ignored. Furthermore, its cultural influence and strategic location make it a pivotal

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, Rita Mae, *“Sudden Death,”* Penguin Books, 1983. Available at: <https://www.amazon.com/Sudden-Death-Rita-Mae-Brown/dp/0553269305>

player in the region, demanding a nuanced and effective approach, particularly from Europe.

The year 1979 marked a significant turning point in Iranian history. The Iranian people, driven by a desire for freedom and justice, overthrew the Shah's dictatorial regime, which had long relied on Western support to maintain its power. This was not the first instance of Western interference in Iran; in 1953, a popular Prime Minister, Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq, was ousted in a coup orchestrated by the United States and the United Kingdom, and assisted by the clerical establishment, including Ayatollah Khomeini's mentor, Ayatollah Abolghassem Khashani.<sup>2</sup> The coup reinstated the Shah and was followed by the creation of his brutal secret police, SAVAK. These actions left a lasting scar on the Iranian people's collective consciousness, fostering deep resentment and suspicion towards the West.

As the Shah's regime crumbled, Western countries, including Europe, were slow to recognize the inevitability of change in Iran. The revolution that ensued was hijacked by Ayatollah Khomeini, as democratic forces had been decimated and their leaders and members either imprisoned or executed; democratic institutions were virtually non-existent. The new regime capitalized on the people's grievances, adopting an aggressively anti-Western stance that reached a climax with the occupation of the US embassy in November 1979.

Since then, the Western world has endeavored to reach a compromise with the belligerent theocracy in Iran. Unfortunately, these efforts have largely ignored the brutal suppression of the Iranian people, offering little more than verbal condemnation. The regime's aggressive regional policy, including hostage-taking of Western nationals in regional countries like Lebanon, became an official strategy. In response, Europe pursued a path of concessions, hoping to encourage the regime to change its behavior, but these attempts ended in abject failure.

The Iranian regime's engagement in terrorism extended to European soil, as evidenced by the bombings in France in the mid-1980s, in which the Iranian embassy was implicated. Rather than adopting a firm stance, Europe made further concessions to secure the release of hostages in Lebanon. Various diplomatic efforts followed, including dialogue, critical dialogue, and constructive dialogue, all aimed, albeit unsuccessfully, at encouraging Iran to modify its behavior through appeasement.

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<sup>2</sup> National Security Archive, "New Findings on Clerical Involvement in the 1953 Coup in Iran, 7 March 2018. Available at: <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/iran/2018-03-07/new-findings-clerical-involvement-1953-coup-iran>

The election of Mohammad Khatami as president was heralded as the dawn of moderation in Iran. Governments, think tanks, and media outlets promoted the narrative that Khatami was a moderate, likening him to the Soviet Mikhail Gorbachev and predicting the imminent transformation of religious dictatorship in Iran. This optimism led Western governments, including those in the US, UK, and European Union, to label Iran's principal opposition, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (PMOI/MEK), as "terrorists" at the regime's behest. Yet even these actions failed to bring about the desired change in Iran's behavior or the overall political landscape.

In 2002, the revelation of the Iranian regime's clandestine nuclear program by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), which has the PMOI/MEK as the main constituent, prompted European efforts to negotiate with Tehran. The European troika's discussions with Iran aimed at curtailing its nuclear ambitions only served to buy Tehran precious time, enabling it to advance its program. Throughout these years, Iran not only advanced its nuclear weapons program but also exploited Western leniency to expand its proxy networks, further destabilizing the region through warfare and terrorism. On European soil, the regime also attempted to bomb the 2018 Free Iran World Summit, organized by the NCRI in Paris, and in 2023, it tried to assassinate a notable European political figure in broad daylight in Madrid, Spain.

The mastermind behind the Paris bombing plot was ultimately returned to Iran even after facing conviction by European courts, thanks to the regime's tactic of hostage diplomacy, where a single hostage's release secured the terrorist's freedom. These events highlight the failure of European policy, underscoring the need for a fundamental policy overhaul.

The enduring failure of our policy towards Iran has prompted the International Committee in Search of Justice (ISJ) to write this paper. We firmly believe that a policy that has been proven wrong for forty years must be reevaluated. It is only logical to change it and adopt a new strategy that better addresses the complexities and challenges posed by Iran in today's geopolitical landscape. Through this paper, we aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of past policies and propose a new direction that aligns with both European interests and the pursuit of regional stability.

## Historical Context and European Policy

To fully appreciate the failure of European policy towards Iran, it is crucial to understand the historical context that has shaped relations between the two. Iran's rich history and strategic importance have always made it a significant focus for European

powers. The country's vast resources, particularly its oil reserves, have made it a coveted ally and a crucial player in the geopolitical chessboard of the Middle East.

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, European involvement in Iran was primarily driven by economic interests. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which later became British Petroleum (BP), played a significant role in shaping British policy towards Iran. The 1953 coup, which overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq, was a stark demonstration of Western interference driven by the desire to control Iran's oil resources.

The revolution of 1979 was a watershed moment. The Shah's regime, marked by autocratic rule and corruption, was replaced by an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini. The new regime's anti-Western rhetoric and actions, including the seizure of the US embassy, set the tone for its foreign policy.

In the years following the revolution, Europe's approach to Iran has been characterized by a desire for engagement through various forms of dialogue. The concept of "critical dialogue" was introduced in the 1990s, aiming to address concerns over human rights and terrorism while keeping diplomatic channels open.

### The Era of Dialogue and Its Shortcomings

The period of Mohammad Khatami's presidency (1997-2005) was seen as a potential turning point. The hope in the West was that engaging with Khatami's government would lead to a more moderate and cooperative Iran.

Despite Khatami's reformist pretenses, the fundamental structures of the Iranian regime remained unchanged. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, retained ultimate authority, and the conservative elements within the regime continued to wield significant power. The European strategy failed to bring about the desired changes in Iran's behavior. Instead, appeasement provided the regime with time and space to strengthen its position both domestically and regionally.

The exposure of Iran's clandestine nuclear program in 2002 further complicated matters. The European Union, led by the UK, France, and Germany (the EU3), embarked on a series of negotiations with Tehran, aimed at curbing its nuclear ambitions. These negotiations were marked by a series of temporary agreements and extensions, which only allowed Iran to advance its nuclear program under the guise of diplomatic talks.

## Regional and Domestic Implications

While Europe has focused on diplomatic engagement and negotiations, Iran has continued to exert its influence across the Middle East. The regime has expanded its network of proxies, supporting groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian territories, and various militias in Iraq and Syria. These actions have contributed to ongoing conflicts and instability in the region, directly challenging European interests in peace and security.

Domestically, the Iranian regime has maintained its repressive grip on power. Human rights abuses, including the suppression of political dissent and the persecution of minority groups, have persisted unabated. The European response to these issues has often been limited to reluctant verbal condemnations and symbolic actions, failing to exert meaningful and practical pressure on the regime.

## Terrorism on European Soil

Iran's involvement in terrorism has not been confined to the Middle East. The regime has orchestrated attacks and assassination attempts on European soil, posing a direct threat to European security. The bombing in France in the 1980s, the assassinations of dissidents in the 1990s and the attempted assassination of opposition figures in recent years are stark reminders of the regime's reach and willingness to use terrorism to achieve its goals. These actions underscore the failure of European policies that have sought to engage Iran through dialogue and concessions.

## Conclusion

The strategy of engagement, dialogue, and concessions has not only failed to bring about positive change but has actually emboldened the Iranian regime to continue its repressive and aggressive actions. The enduring nature of these policies, despite their obvious failure, highlights a reluctance to confront the harsh realities of Iran's behavior.

It is imperative that Europe re-evaluates its approach to Iran. A policy that has proven ineffective for four decades must be replaced with a new strategy that addresses the complexities of the Iranian regime and its impact on regional and global stability.

Significantly, the current axis of warmongering and global destabilization—comprising Russia, Venezuela, and Iran—relies heavily on the mullahs' regime as a crucial pillar. The transformation of Iran from a terrorist tyranny into a stable and normal democracy would strike at the heart of this alliance, significantly weakening its capacity to sow

discord. Such a transformation would not only dismantle one of the most dangerous networks of global instability but would also lead to a profound and positive shift in the international landscape, paving the way for a more secure and peaceful world order.

Fortunately, a viable path exists for regime change in Iran, one that transcends the binary choice of appeasement or military confrontation. The critical missing link in Western policy has been the neglect of the Iranian people and their organized resistance—a force of considerable strategic value. Despite widespread discontent and repeated popular uprisings against the theocracy, Western strategies have largely overlooked these catalysts for meaningful change.

As this paper seeks to elucidate, the Iranian people and their resistance represent an untapped reservoir of strategic potential. Properly harnessed, this force could become the pivotal element in reshaping not only the geopolitical dynamics of the region but the broader global landscape as well.

## Chapter 1

### Consolidating Power to Prevent Protests

Iran's political landscape has in recent years undergone profound transformations, influenced significantly by a series of nationwide uprisings calling for the regime's overthrow. Meanwhile, the regime has pivoted to survival mode by closing ranks. This shift, commonly referred to as a policy of "contraction" or "purification," began to crystallize notably during the 2019 demonstrations, where Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's reaction marked a definitive pivot towards this approach. The regime's contraction and unavoidable domestic isolation can be interpreted as a signal of its inevitable downfall in the face of an overwhelming popular groundswell.

Khamenei's epiphany on this strategic pivot was initially catalysed by the widespread protests of 2017 and 2018, which effectively dismantled the regime's fabricated dichotomy of "moderates" versus "hardliners." For over forty years since the regime's establishment, this false narrative had historically served to deceive Western interlocutors, underpinning the regime's quest for political and economic concessions by presenting a facade of internal reform and moderation. Western powers, particularly within the European Union, had justified their continued engagement with Tehran—despite its egregious human rights abuses, relentless pursuit of nuclear capabilities, and terrorism in the region and even Europe—by clinging to the hope that supporting purportedly "moderate" elements within the regime could induce true reform and change in behaviour.

However, the resounding nationwide chants of "hardliner, reformer, the game is now over" during the protests that began in December 2017 and continued into 2018, were an immensely popular message to the West. The uprising demonstrated unequivocally that the Iranian people had seen through the illusion of meaningful factional differences being peddled by the regime. This trend compelled Khamenei to realize that the old strategy of manipulating perceived political divisions to secure Western leniency and aid had lost its effectiveness, necessitating a new course of suppression and internal consolidation to maintain control.

Understanding the nature, scope, message, and impact of multiple nationwide uprisings since 2017 is crucial for grasping the dynamics of these transformative developments that have pushed the Iranian regime to a critical juncture. These uprisings have exposed deep-seated vulnerabilities within the regime, highlighting its inability to navigate the profound crises it faces both domestically and regionally. The cumulative effect of these protests has cornered the regime, leaving it ill-prepared for the inevitable surge of

further unrest, which officials both privately and publicly acknowledge could be far more extensive and intense.

The stark realization within the regime's leadership is that there is a visible historical trend, and that the upcoming waves of dissent will surpass previous ones in both scale and ferocity, posing an unprecedented challenge to their control. This looming threat of a more powerful and possibly uncontrollable uprising reflects a significant shift in the public's tolerance and the effectiveness of the regime's repressive strategies, signalling a pivotal moment of reckoning for Iran's theocratic rulers.

In the same vein, it is crucial for Western nations to recognize that the status quo in Iran is untenable. A more appropriate policy would be to pivot towards supporting the real agents of change and the future of the country—the Iranian people themselves.

### The 2017-18 Uprising

In December 2017 and January 2018, Iran experienced a massive nationwide uprising that spread across all 31 provinces and over 142 cities. This uprising was a turning point in the struggle against 40 years of theocratic rule in Iran. Despite the clerical regime's extensive efforts to suppress the protests, including killings and executions, the discontent continued to simmer, leading to ongoing demonstrations throughout the year.

The dire economic conditions, caused by decades of deeply rooted corruption and mismanagement, plunged the majority of Iranians into poverty. Even official statistics, often manipulated in the regime's favour, indicated that the inflation rate in Iran surged from over 10% in 2017 to 29% in 2018, with projections at the time to reach 35% in 2019. A significant portion of the population struggled with unemployment, mass poverty, inflation, and a drastic reduction in purchasing power. The International Monetary Fund reported a negative 1.5% economic growth in 2018, with predictions of a further decline to -3.6% in 2019 and a GDP reduction of \$97 billion.

The initial wave of protests in December 2017 saw massive participation across the country, with demonstrators calling for the overthrow of the clerical regime. They were followed by uprisings in January, May, June, July, and August of 2018 in several major provinces, with different strata of society, including truck drivers, teachers, Bazaar merchants, workers, farmers, and retirees, expressing their local and national grievances, all of which coalesced around the call for regime change.

As expected, the regime relied heavily on suppression, killings, and executions to stifle the dissent. However, the protests revealed the regime's vulnerability and isolation, both domestically and internationally. The 2017-2018 uprising was marked by the emergence and active participation of the Resistance Units, teams of young men and women affiliated with the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK), as a new phenomenon. Its crucial role in recent years has been acknowledged by the regime.

The most important takeaway from the 2017-2018 protests was the overwhelming rejection of all the regime's factions, particularly "hardliners" and "reformists." The Iranian people sought a complete overthrow of the entire regime.

For many years, the narrative of "reformists" vs. "hardliners" was used by the Supreme Leader with two objectives: Channelling the growing popular discontent at home into possible change from within the regime, which remained under his own control; and on the international level to maintain the illusion of reform from within the regime. The protests demonstrated the resilience of the Iranian people and their determination to fight for their rights despite severe repression.

Additionally, they highlighted the significant influence of the Resistance Units affiliated with the PMOI/MEK, Iran's foremost opposition group, in directing and influencing developments within the country. This impact was so pronounced that a visibly shaken Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei publicly recognized their role in the uprisings. Khamenei said in a speech on January 9, 2018: "The third angle of the triangle consists of the US submissive henchmen: Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, the murderous MEK. They were prepared months ago. The media of the MEK admitted to this: to organize riots, meet with this or that person, find individuals inside the country to help them fan out to the people. And that it was they who initiated this.... They began with a slogan [to catch attention] in opposition to high prices. Well, this is a slogan that everyone likes. They wanted to attract some people with this message, then enter the arena themselves to pursue their evil goals and attract followers. What people did here is this: they came to (the) streets."<sup>3</sup>

## The 2019 Uprising

The November 2019 uprising, driven by economic grievances and demands for regime change, once again challenged the mullahs' authority in an unprecedented manner. The regime's response was brutal: a severe crackdown ordered by Supreme Leader Ali

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<sup>3</sup> Ali Khamenei's meeting with the people of Qom, 9 January 2018. Available at: <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/5397/The-people-have-always-entered-the-arena-whenever-the-country>

Khamenei resulted in over 1,500<sup>4</sup> deaths and numerous injuries and arrests. Despite this repression, the gains from the uprising are seen as irreversible, highlighting persistent unrest and the regime's inherent weaknesses.

The protests were characterized by anti-regime slogans and significant participation across major cities like Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, and Shiraz. The regime's deployment of extensive resources, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and State Security Force (SSF), underscored its fear of losing control. The crackdown involved coordinated efforts across various provinces, with local commanders playing significant roles in the repression. The scale of the suppression only fuelled public outrage, further igniting the protests. A particularly brutal crackdown occurred in Mahshahr, in southern Iran, where security forces used heavy machine guns and helicopters to quell protests, resulting in numerous deaths that included women and children.<sup>5</sup> Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, President Hassan Rouhani, and IRGC commanders were central to the suppression. The protesters also rejected both the regime's theocracy and the former monarchical dictatorship of the Shah prior to the 1979 anti-monarchical revolution.

The Iranian regime accused the PMOI of leading the protests, pointing to a well-organized opposition that has long been a thorn in the regime's side. This highlighted the ongoing struggle between the regime and organized resistance movement, which continues to challenge the mullahs' authority despite severe repression. In a speech on January 8, 2020, Khamenei said, “Several days before the uprising, in a small and sinister country in Europe an American and a number of Iranians drew up plans, which we saw in the gasoline incident. As soon as (protesting) people came to the scene, the enemy’s operatives began. Demolishing, torching, murder, destroy, and foment war. This was a renewal of the work they had carried out before. And they continue to take these actions and they will do whatever they can.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Reuters News Agency, “Special Report: Iran’s Leader Ordered crackdown on Unrest - 'Do Whatever it Takes to End it'”, 24 December 2019. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/special-report-irans-leader-ordered-crackdown-on-unrest-do-whatever-it-take-idUSKBN1YR0QO/>

<sup>5</sup> Michael R. Pompeo, U.S. Secretary of State, Department of State, “Commemoration of the Massacre of Mahshahr and Designation of Iranian Officials Due to involvement in Gross Violations of Human Rights,” 18 November 2020. Available at: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/commemoration-of-the-massacre-of-mahshahr-and-designation-of-iranian-officials-due-to-involvement-in-gross-violations-of-human-rights/>

<sup>6</sup> Ali Khamenei speaking at a meeting to honor IRGC’s Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani, who had been killed at Baghdad Airport, 8 January 2020. Available in Farsi at: <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id+44628>

The November 2019 uprising highlighted the need for robust international measures to support the Iranian people's quest for freedom and to hold the regime accountable for its crimes.

Moreover, what distinguished the 2019 protests was the significant involvement of the poor, the underprivileged, and the downtrodden sectors of society, long, albeit mistakenly, perceived by analysts as the backbone of the regime's support. This participation marked a crucial shift in the socio-political landscape of Iran, indicating that the regime's base of presumed support was eroding. The active participation of these marginalized groups not only expanded the demographic reach of the protests but also underscored the deep-seated discontent permeating all levels of Iranian society. This widespread dissatisfaction explained the ferocious nature of the uprising, as hundreds of regime centres, government-controlled banks, IRGC bases, and other government agencies<sup>7</sup> were torched and destroyed by throngs of enraged citizens. The targeting of IRGC and other repressive forces<sup>8</sup> by the protesters highlighted the intensity of their anger and the breadth of their grievances against the state apparatus, signalling a significant escalation in the methods and aims of the public dissent.

### The 2022 Uprising

On September 16, 2022, the tragic death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini, a 22-year-old woman from Seqqez, Kurdistan province, while in the custody of the "Morality Police," sparked another wave of widespread protests across Iran that were growing in strength since 2017. By September 22, 2022, demonstrations had spread to more than 150 cities and 31 provinces, fuelled by social media despite the regime's attempts to shut down the internet. The protests were not spontaneous but rather the result of 40 years of organized resistance, particularly by women who have long been active in underground activism and within the PMOI/MEK.

Iran's economic situation in 2022 was dire, with a 50% surge in the cost of living, a plummeting currency, and soaring food prices. These economic hardships, in

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<sup>7</sup> Reuters News Agency, "Iran Says Hundreds of Banks Were Torched in 'Vast' Unrest plot," 27 November 2019. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-gasoline-protests-minister-idUSKBN1Y10GY/>

<sup>8</sup> "Iran: November 2019 Uprising and Its Amplifications." According to the regime's own officials, dozens of centers of repression, such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Bassij, and police headquarters were attacked or torched, NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee. 9 November 2020. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/iran-protests/iran-november-2019-uprising-and-its-amplifications/>

conjunction with the regime's political suppression, acted as a catalyst for the protests, exacerbating the existing political and social grievances.

These protests saw unprecedented participation from various segments of society, including the middle class, merchants, the impoverished working class, and even traditional conservative groups. Women and young people were at the forefront, highlighting a broad-based discontent with the regime's oppressive policies.

Protesters chanted slogans such as "Death to the oppressor, be it the Shah or the Supreme Leader," and "Death to the dictator." These slogans encapsulated the protesters' broad discontent with authoritarian rule and their desire for a democratic republic.

The PMOI's Resistance Units played a decisive role in organizing, leading, expanding, and sustaining the uprisings. Supreme Leader Khamenei publicly acknowledged the role of these units, confirming the regime's concern over the growing influence of organized opposition.

While the 2019 uprising was primarily fuelled by economic issues, the 2022 uprising was sparked by a specific incident of state violence. These uprisings demonstrated the regime's structural and fundamental inability to address the needs of its citizens and the growing influence of the organized opposition.

### Consolidation of Power through Purges

Amidst growing popular uprisings, the Iranian regime's parliamentary elections on 21 February 2020 marked a profound shift in the internal dynamics of the ruling elite.

In response to these challenges, Supreme Leader Khamenei sought to consolidate power by purging rival factions within the regime. This strategic move aimed to unify his forces for increased repression and to prevent any potential rift that could lead to further social unrest and uprisings. The Guardian Council, a powerful unelected vetting body whose 12 members are appointed either directly or indirectly by Khamenei, disqualified 90 sitting members of parliament, some with up to three terms of service, ensuring that candidates in 170 districts were exclusively from Khamenei's faction. This effectively secured 260 seats for his loyalists, marginalizing the rival factions.

Khamenei's endorsement of the Guardian Council's disqualifications on February 5, 2020, underscored his intent to eliminate all rivals within the Parliament. This purge highlighted the regime's vulnerability and Khamenei's low tolerance for rival voices, as

he faced a stark choice between allowing internal divisions to fester or taking drastic measures to enforce unity.

Three primary factors drove this purge:

1. **Fear of Uprisings:** The regime feared that any internal split would embolden public protests and deepen internal schisms, potentially leading to defections among those less loyal to Khamenei.
2. **Strategic Consolidation:** By eliminating rival factions, Khamenei aimed to consolidate power and ensure a unified front capable of implementing his oppressive policies without internal resistance that was critical for his plans to anoint a successor before he dies.
3. **Mitigating Vulnerabilities:** The increasing pressures on the regime necessitated a reduction in internal conflicts to maintain control and prevent further destabilization.

Despite this massive purge, the regime's so-called moderate president Hassan Rouhani, whose interests aligned with preserving the regime, urged voters to participate in the elections. He framed voting as a national and religious duty, emphasizing the importance of engagement over apathy. Rouhani's plea underscored the regime's reliance on the facade of democratic processes to legitimize its rule, despite the clear lack of genuine reformist elements within the government.

Many candidates poised to enter the new parliament had deep ties to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Qods Force, Basij, and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), entities synonymous with the regime's oppressive apparatus. This alignment starkly contrasted with the sentiments of the Iranian people, who boycotted the elections and called for regime change with chants of "My vote is regime change."

### The Rise of Raisi

In the years leading up to the 2017 presidential election, Iran's regime was strategically bolstering its regional and missile capabilities using funds released by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, all the while covertly advancing its nuclear project. To maintain his hegemony domestically, Khamenei need a loyal figure as president who would facilitate the appointment of his favourite successor, most likely his son, Mojtaba.

Khamenei's strategy began with Raisi's appointment to Astan Quds Razavi, a wealthy religious endowment, which provided Raisi with significant financial and economic leverage. In March 2019, Khamenei further positioned Raisi for future leadership by appointing him as head of the Judiciary, replacing Sadeq Amoli Larijani. As the Judiciary Chief, Raisi vigorously suppressed dissent, positioning himself as a "champion against corruption" by orchestrating high-profile arrests and trials, including that of Larijani's deputy, Akbar Tabari.

The November 2019 uprising gave a glimpse of the real prospects of overthrow, driving Khamenei to intensify his consolidation efforts. As mentioned, during the February 2020 parliamentary elections, the Guardian Council purged rival parliamentary factions, ensuring a parliament wholly aligned with Khamenei. The regime's own media acknowledged the "lowest turnout in the Islamic Republic's history," reflecting widespread public disillusionment and boycott.

On 18 June 2021, Khamenei took a significant political gamble to install Raisi as president. The Guardian Council disqualified a long list of loyalists to pave the way, including the likes of Ali Larijani, who had been the Parliament Speaker for 12 years, Secretary to the Supreme National Security Council for two years, the Head of the State and Radio Television for 10 years, inciting internal regime conflicts. The purge extended to educational institutions and government offices, cementing a singular narrative of loyalty and suppression.

For the next three years, Raisi, alongside Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, a protégé of the IRGC's Qods Force Chief Soleimani, advanced Khamenei's agenda both domestically and internationally. Raisi's role in the Assembly of Experts, pivotal in the succession process, further underscored his centrality to Khamenei's long-term plans.

Tehran's involvement in various international conflicts, from Gaza to Ukraine, highlighted the regime's commitment to leveraging chaos as a means of survival. The appointment of the 93-year-old hardliner Ali Movahedi-Kermani as speaker of the Assembly of Experts after Raisi's selection sent a clear message: the regime's survival instincts remain unaltered.

Raisi's instalment on June 19, 2021, prompted Amnesty International to call for an investigation into Raisi for crimes against humanity, including his role in the 1988 massacre of political prisoners. Human Rights Watch and the International Federation for Human Rights similarly denounced his judicial career marked by repression and execution of dissidents.

Raisi's trajectory from a teenager in 1979 to Khamenei's preferred successor is marked by relentless ambition and brutality. His early roles as prosecutor in Karaj and Hamedan saw him overseeing the interrogation, torture, and execution of thousands of political prisoners. By the age of 24, as deputy of the Central Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office, he was appointed as a member of the Tehran "death commission", which sent tens of thousands of political prisoners to the gallows during the massacre of 30,000 political prisoners in 1988.

Raisi's judicial appointment in 2018 by Khamenei was a strategic move to prepare him for potential succession. His meetings with IRGC commanders and his initiation of teaching Kharej lessons at the seminary in 2018 signalled Khamenei's long-term investment in Raisi as his successor. Despite never holding elected office, Raisi's trajectory reflects a meticulously crafted rise, orchestrated by Khamenei to ensure continuity of the regime's repressive and extremist policies.

### Raisi's death

Khamenei's reliance on Raisi was not without reason. In many ways, Raisi was the quintessential president for the Supreme Leader, universally backed by all factions within the Supreme Leader's circle. His extensive career positioned him uniquely within the Principlist faction. He was singularly capable of consolidating the internal factions under Khamenei's leadership. Effectively, Raisi served as a cohesive force within the ruling structure, firmly aligning the government bureaucracy with the directives of Khamenei's office (Beit), known among insiders as the regime's 'deep state.' In this role, not even members of the Majlis could challenge his authority.

His death in a helicopter crash on May 19, 2024, dealt a devastating and irreparable blow to the already fragile and decaying regime of the mullahs. This loss came at a critical juncture, irreversibly disrupting the internal balance of power and thrusting the regime into unprecedented turmoil. Raisi, with his extensive history of execution, repression, and unwavering obedience to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, was a linchpin in the strategy of maximum suppression. His death left a void that is both strategic and symbolic.

Khamenei had long earmarked Raisi to enforce his policy of suppression and pre-empt any potential uprisings. Raisi's presidency inflicted unprecedented hardship on Iran's deprived population, implementing policies that exacerbated suffering. Some 1,877 people, including many dissidents, were executed under Raisi's tenure. His death shattered Khamenei's dreams of maintaining control through unified suppression.

This loss sets off a cascade of crises within the regime, paving the way for popular uprisings and the advancement of Iranian dissidents. The regime's internal fractures, now laid bare, signal an opportunity for change and a potential shift towards liberation from decades of authoritarian rule. The Iranian people are poised to continue to push for fundamental change and the establishment of a democratic and secular republic that rejects authoritarian rule, whether the former Pahlavi monarchy or the current theocracy.

## Chapter 2

### Masoud Pezeshkian's True Colours

Under the rule of the mullahs, the concept of democratic elections is meaningless. While Iran holds regular votes for various positions, including the presidency and parliament, these elections are far from free and fair. Instead, they are part of a carefully orchestrated process designed to maintain the power structure dominated by the Supreme Leader and the clerical establishment.

At the heart of Iran's electoral system lies the Guardian Council<sup>9</sup>, a 12-member body with extensive powers that effectively controls the entire election process. This council, completely under the influence of the Supreme Leader, serves as a gatekeeper, deciding who can and cannot run for office.

The Guardian Council's role in elections is threefold:

1. Vetting candidates: The council has the authority to approve or disqualify any individual seeking to run for local, parliamentary, presidential, or Assembly of Experts positions.
2. Supervising elections: The council oversees the entire electoral process, from campaigning to vote counting.
3. Interpreting election laws: As the final arbiter of election-related disputes, the Guardian Council wields significant influence over the interpretation and implementation of electoral laws.

The composition of the Guardian Council itself reflects the centralisation of power in Iran. Half of its members are Islamic law experts directly appointed by the Supreme Leader, while the other half are jurists nominated by the Chief Justice (who is also appointed by the Supreme Leader) and confirmed by the parliament.

This structure ensures that even the pool of "approved" candidates consists only of individuals deemed loyal to the Supreme Leader and the principles of the Islamic Republic. As a result, elections in Iran often amount to a selection process among pre-approved candidates rather than a genuine expression of the popular will.

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<sup>9</sup> Organizational Chart of the Islamic Republic of Iran, The Guardian Council, <https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/government-institution/guardian-council>

Furthermore, even after a president is elected, they remain subordinate to the Supreme Leader, who retains the constitutional authority to dismiss them. This arrangement further undermines the notion of democratic accountability and popular sovereignty.

This system creates a closed circle of power, where true opposition voices are systematically excluded from the political process. The result is a political landscape where meaningful change through electoral means is virtually impossible, as all major decisions ultimately trace back to the Supreme Leader and his appointed officials and bodies.

### A Decisive Boycott

The 2024 presidential election in Iran was met with a massive boycott that unmistakably rejected not just the election, but the entire theocracy. Despite concerted efforts by various factions within the regime, including the so-called “reformists,” to mobilize voter participation, an astonishing 91% of eligible voters abstained from participating in the second round of presidential elections, according to monitoring by the PMOI/MEK<sup>10</sup>. This figure starkly contradicts the regime's official claim of over 40% turnout, exposing a desperate attempt to maintain a facade of legitimacy.

The boycott's decisive nature cannot be overstated. It transcended traditional political divides, rendering obsolete the long-standing narrative of "reformists" versus "hardliners," which had already been debunked during the 2017/2018 uprisings. Even prominent figures associated with the so-called reformist camp, such as former Presidents Mohammad Khatami and Hassan Rouhani, and former Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, found their calls for participation flatly rejected.

The boycott represents a clear and unequivocal statement by the Iranian people: a rejection of the entire theocratic system, from the Supreme Leader down to the so-called elected officials.

This widespread abstention has dealt a significant blow to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's efforts to consolidate power and ensure the regime's survival. The election, far from strengthening the regime's position, has instead exposed its deep-seated vulnerabilities and lack of popular support.

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<sup>10</sup> “91 Percent of Iranians Boycotted Khamenei's Election Charade,” The People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), 6 July 2024. Available at: <https://english.mojahedin.org/news/91-percent-of-iranians-boycotted-khameneis-election-charade/>

The newly "elected" president, Masoud Pezeshkian, despite attempts to present a moderate image, has already pledged unwavering allegiance to the Supreme Leader and the principles of the theocracy. His admission that all significant policies are set by Khamenei only serves to reinforce the perception that no real change is possible within the current system.

The boycott has intensified internal power struggles within the regime, with various factions now engaged in increasingly bitter conflicts. The foundations of the system appear to be crumbling from within, potentially signalling the beginning of a new and much more unstable phase for the regime.

### The Myth of Moderation

The notion of reformist politicians within the Iranian regime is a persistent myth. From the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 to the present day, the dichotomy between so-called reformists and hardliners has served as a strategic facade. The slogan "Reformers, hardliners, the game in now is over"<sup>11</sup> starkly illustrates this point. First chanted by students during a protest in December 2017 at Tehran University, this phrase has since echoed through numerous uprisings across the nation.

The concept of reform within the fundamentalist theocracy has been manipulated to maintain the regime's grip on power. When Mohammad Khatami was elected president in 1997, he presented himself under the appealing banners of "civil society" and "dialogue among civilizations." Yet, as Massoud Rajavi, leader of the Iranian Resistance, aptly noted, "A viper does not give birth to a dove." His emphasis that no real reform could emerge from the Supreme Leader's system has been validated over time.

### Past is Prologue

Generally speaking, Western analysts and observers of Iranian politics have often overlooked or perhaps deliberately ignored the significant role that so-called reformers have played in governing Iran. These "reformist" leaders have controlled the executive branch for 34 of the Islamic Republic's 45 years of existence. During the 1980s, under the so-called reformist Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi, Iran witnessed harrowing atrocity crimes in 1981-1982 and 1988, including the summary and extrajudicial execution of at least 120,000 dissidents. "In my opinion, the greatest crime committed during the Islamic Republic, for which history will condemn us, has been committed

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<sup>11</sup> "Reformers, Hardliners, the Game in Now is Over," The BBC Persian. Available in Farsi at: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-57496978>

by you. Your (names) will in the future be etched in the annals of history as criminals,” Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, the designated successor to Ayatollah Khomeini, told the members of the “death commission” in Tehran in August 1988.<sup>12</sup>

The 1990s, under the leadership of the "pragmatist" Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and the "perestroika advocate" Mohammad Khatami, were marked by the most extensive assassinations of dissidents abroad and the grisly chain murders of intellectuals within Iran.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, under Hassan Rouhani’s presidency, Iran saw rapid advancements in its nuclear, missile, and drone programs, and the nationwide uprisings of 2017/2018 and 2019 were brutally suppressed. This historical oversight challenges the narrative of reform within the Iranian political structure, revealing a continuity of suppression and aggression regardless of the reformist label.

More specifically, the tenure of so-called reformist presidents provides stark evidence against the myth of reform. During the so-called reformist Hassan Rouhani’s presidency, the annual number of executions was higher than during hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s term. Over Rouhani’s eight years in office, over 4,000 executions were carried out<sup>14</sup>, not including numerous extrajudicial killings through torture, medical neglect, and direct lethal force during protests. In November 2019, a nationwide uprising saw regime forces, under a “reformist” administration, kill approximately 1,500 protesters<sup>15</sup> and arrest 12,000 more, many of whom were subjected to severe torture.

The brutality under reformist administrations is not a recent phenomenon. As noted above, in 1988, under the administration of Mir Hossein Mousavi, one of the regime’s most heinous crimes occurred. Around 30,000 political prisoners<sup>16</sup> were executed and

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<sup>12</sup> “Audio File Revives Calls For Inquiry into Massacre of Iran Political Prisoners,” The Guardian, 11 August 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2016/aug/11/hossein-ali-montazeri-audio-file-calls-for-inquiry-1988-massacre-iran-political-prisoners>

<sup>13</sup> “Iran: Alarming Pattern of Killings and ‘Disappearances,’” Amnesty International, 11 December 1998. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/mde130251998en.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> “Executions under Hassan Rouhani’s Presidency,” Iran Human Rights, 13 April 2021, <https://www.iranhr.net/en/articles/4682/>

<sup>15</sup> “Special Report: Iran’s Leader Ordered Crackdown on Unrest – ‘Do Whatever it Takes to End it,’” 24 December 2019. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/special-report-irans-leader-ordered-crackdown-on-unrest-do-whatever-it-take-idUSKBN1YR0QO/>

<sup>16</sup> Civil Society Hearing into the 1988 Massacre in Iran, 19 June 2024. Available at: <https://iran1988.org/#:~:text=JVMI%20is%20an%20association%20of%20families%20of%20the,for%20all%20the%20victims%20of%20executions%20in%20Iran.>

buried in secret mass graves, revealing the regime's underlying continuity of repression regardless of its leadership's supposed political alignment.

The legacy of brutality under so-called reformist administrations demonstrates that the Iranian regime's fundamental nature remains unchanged regardless of which faction is in power. In this context, elections in Iran are mere exercises in power-sharing between factions with differing personal interests without any substantive differences in policy or ideology.

### Actions Speak Louder Than Words

The new president of the Iranian regime, Masoud Pezeshkian, has become a focal point of debate and speculation. Although hailed by some in the West as a relative reformist, a closer examination of his background, statements, and actions paints a markedly different picture – one of a staunch loyalist deeply embedded within the ideological framework of the Islamic Republic.

Pezeshkian's political career spans several decades, during which he has held numerous high-profile positions within the Iranian regime. From his early days as an IRGC combatant and physician during the Iran-Iraq War to his later role as the Minister of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education under President Mohammad Khatami's administration, Pezeshkian has consistently demonstrated his unwavering loyalty to the regime's ideologies and policies<sup>17</sup>.

One of the most telling episodes in Pezeshkian's career occurred in 2003 when he played a key role in supporting the regime's false narrative to cover up the brutal murder of Iranian Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi. Despite international calls for a thorough investigation, Pezeshkian dismissed any signs of foul play, effectively shutting down requests for an independent international inquiry.

Pezeshkian's actions regarding women's rights and freedoms further underscore his alignment with the regime's most repressive policies. In a 2017 interview, he proudly admitted to being among the first to prohibit the entry of unveiled women and girls into universities and hospitals, even before the mandatory hijab policy was officially

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<sup>17</sup> "Who is Masoud Pezeshkian: Minister, MP, and Eternal Conformist Serving Iran's Regime," NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 16 June 2024. Available at: <https://www.ncri-iran.org/en/news/iran-election/elections-candidates-biography/who-is-masoud-pezeshkian-minister-mp-and-eternal-conformist-serving-irans-regime/>

introduced<sup>18</sup>. This early crackdown on women's rights serves as a stark reminder of Pezeshkian's commitment to upholding the regime's restrictive social policies.

### Alignment with Khamenei

Pezeshkian's own words and actions in recent years leave little room for doubt about his unwavering allegiance to the Supreme Leader and the regime's destructive policies at home and in the region. His statements during the 2024 presidential campaign and in the lead-up to his election are particularly revealing.

First and foremost, Pezeshkian has professed his unequivocal devotion to the Supreme Leader, stating, "I accept the Supreme Leader; I am totally dissolved in the Supreme Leader."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Pezeshkian has openly expressed his pride in wearing the uniform of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)<sup>20</sup>, an organization known for its involvement in regional conflicts and its designation as a terrorist entity by the United States and Canada. His praise for controversial figures like Qassem Soleimani<sup>21</sup>, whom he described as a "national hero," further solidifies his alignment with the regime's most hardline elements.

Pezeshkian's commitment to maintaining the status quo is perhaps the most telling aspect of his political philosophy. In a statement to Aftab News, he declared, "We are not going to write a new program and announce a new policy in the country. The general policies of the Supreme Leader are clear and, naturally, every government that comes to power must implement the development plan based on the general policies announced by the leader of the revolution."<sup>22</sup> This unequivocal commitment to continuity leaves little room for hope in terms of any meaningful reform or moderation under his presidency.

Pezeshkian's stance on human rights and the regime's regional interventionism further underscores his alignment with the Supreme Leader's agenda. During the widespread

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<sup>18</sup> Radio Farda, 4 July 2024

<sup>19</sup> "Pezeshkian: 'I am dissolved in the Supreme Leader,'" Mashreq, 18 June 2024, available in Farsi at: [www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1614447/](http://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1614447/)

<sup>20</sup> "Pezeshkian: I Will Again Wear the IRGC's Uniform; If It Were Not for the IRGC, this Country Would Have Disintegrated and We Would Have Been Finished," Students New Agency, SNN. Available in Farsi at: <https://snn.ir/fa/news/1047288/>

<sup>21</sup> "Pezeshkian: 'Martyr Soleimani Neither Quarreled with, Nor Eliminated Anyone,'" ISNA News Agency, 20 July 2024. Available in Farsi at: [www.isna.ir/news/1403043018880/](http://www.isna.ir/news/1403043018880/)

<sup>22</sup> "Masoud Pezeshkian: I Will Implement the 7<sup>th</sup> Plan Based on the Supreme Leader's Policies," Aftab News, 20 June 2024. Available in Farsi at: <https://aftabnews.ir/fa/news/913544/>

protests following the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022, Pezeshkian condemned the demonstrations, warning against "actions that could lead to national instability." This position prioritizes the regime's security over the legitimate grievances of the Iranian people, demonstrating a complete disregard for fundamental human rights.

Moreover, Pezeshkian has voiced his unwavering support for the regime's interventionist policies in the region, particularly regarding its backing of militant groups and proxy forces. In a statement to the ISNA News Agency, he affirmed, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always supported the resistance of the people of the region against the illegitimate Zionist regime. The support of the resistance is rooted in the fundamental policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the ideals of Imam Khomeini, and the guidelines of the Supreme Leader and will continue with strength<sup>23</sup>."

Pezeshkian's stance on the Iranian regime's nuclear ambitions also aligns with the Supreme Leader's agenda. Despite international concerns and ongoing negotiations, Pezeshkian has shown no indication of a willingness to compromise or deviate from the regime's pursuit of nuclear capabilities. He will continue to prioritize the regime's strategic interests over diplomacy and de-escalation.

During a press conference, U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller addressed questions about Masoud Pezeshkian's selection as president and the potential for change in Iran. Miller's response was blunt: "We have no expectations that this election will lead to a fundamental change in Iran's direction or its policies. At the end of the day, it's not the president that has the ultimate say over the future of Iran's policy; it is the Supreme Leader, and of course, we have seen the direction that he has chosen to take Iran in. Obviously, if the new president had the authority to make steps to curtail Iran's nuclear program, to stop funding terrorism, to stop destabilizing activities in the region, those would be steps that we would welcome. But, needless to say, we don't have any expectations that that's what's likely to ensue."<sup>24</sup>

True to form, in a phone call with the head of the Houthis' Supreme Political Council, Pezeshkian praised the group's military aggression in the Red Sea, including attacks on

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<sup>23</sup> "Pezeshkian to Hezbollah Secretary General: Support for the Resistance Will Continue with Full Power," ISNA News Agency, 8 July 2024. Available in Farsi at <https://www.isna.ir/news/>

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Miller, Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, Press Briefing, 8 July 2024, Available at: <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-july-8-2024/>

commercial and foreign vessels. He even claimed that these actions were "a practical support for Palestine," while criticizing other Arab nations for their "inaction."<sup>25</sup>

Pezeshkian's outreach hasn't stopped there. He has also reaffirmed Tehran's strong ties with Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad<sup>26</sup>, whose regime has been condemned globally for its brutal repression of its own people, including the use of chemical weapons. He is indeed reinforcing Tehran's sustained support for terrorist groups.

The continuation of the regime's dangerous agenda under Pezeshkian is further evidenced by the recent wave of executions in Iran.<sup>27</sup> Just days before Pezeshkian was to unveil his cabinet, at least 29 prisoners were executed, bringing to 60 the number of those hanged in one week,<sup>28</sup> signalling a grim persistence of the regime's brutal domestic policies.

This brutality is not limited to executions, however. The regime's oppressive nature is also evident in incidents where morality police violently attacked teenage girls for allegedly wearing improper hijab.

### A Tailor-Made Cabinet

Nowhere is Pezeshkian's subservience and fealty to Khamenei more vividly displayed than in his selection of cabinet ministers.<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding that three ministers—Intelligence Minister Ismaeil Khatib, Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi, and Justice

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<sup>25</sup> "Pezeshkian Thanks the Houthis in Yemen for 'Supporting Palestine,'" Radio Farda, 14 July 2024. Available at: <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/pezeshkian-thanks-yemen-s-houthis/33036000.html>

<sup>26</sup> Pezeshkian in Conversation with Asad: "Strengthening Cooperation with Syria is a Strategic Policy for Iran," Basirat website, 20 July 2024. Available in Farsi at: <https://basirat.ir/fa/mobile/362350#>

<sup>27</sup> "Iran: Khamenei Sets New Execution Record: At Least 29 Executed on Wednesday," NCRI, 7 August 2024. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/human-rights/stop-executions-in-iran/iran-khamenei-sets-new-execution-record-at-least-29-executed-on-wednesday/>

<sup>28</sup> "60 Executions in 9 Days During the Introduction of Khamenei's New President's Cabinet, The Execution Cabinet: One Execution Every 3.5 hours," NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 14 August 2024. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/ncri-statements/statement-human-rights/seven-executions-on-wednesday-in-iran/>

<sup>29</sup> Iranian State Television, IRIB, 20 August 2024, NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/ncri-statements/mrs-maryam-rajavi-no-change-in-iranian-regime-and-its-new-government/>

Minister Amin-Hossein Rahimi—were carried over from Raisi's administration, the rest were clearly chosen with Khamenei's explicit endorsement, in consultation with intelligence, security agencies, and the IRGC. Facing a fractious internal power dynamic, Pezeshkian revealed the extent of Khamenei's influence well before the parliamentary "confirmation" hearings. He expressed his exasperation openly, stating, "Why are you making me say things I shouldn't?" He admitted that his actions were coordinated meticulously at every level, emphasizing, "We did nothing without coordination, whether with the lower committees or at the top [with Khamenei], with those we had to coordinate with... We agreed with all those we had to, including the security organizations, the IRGC, the Intelligence Organization, and all we needed to agree with."

Pezeshkian disclosed even more direct interventions by Khamenei, including a specific directive over the phone to the nominee for the Ministry of Culture to accept his role and a personal instruction to appoint the sole female minister to the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, asserting, "It was the Leader himself who said she should be appointed." He further noted that Abbas Araghchi, the Foreign Minister, was the first to receive Khamenei's approval, even before the full ministerial list was formally reviewed.

The composition of this cabinet, alongside the process through which it was appointed, vividly illustrates that the new government, much like its predecessors, functions primarily as an extension of Khamenei and the IRGC's will. In a revealing moment, Pezeshkian's declaration to the parliament encapsulated this continuity: "Trust us; it's not like someone would come in opposition to Velayat (Khamenei), and I would compromise with them." Furthermore, he affirmed his allegiance with a solemn vow: "By God, we are resolute in achieving the vision set by the Supreme Leader."

The truth is plain and simple: Pezeshkian's presidency marks a continuation of the Iranian regime's policies of aggression, support for terrorism, and harsh suppression of its own people. While Pezeshkian may attempt to cloak himself in the guise of reform, his actions speak louder than his words. His cabinet's unwavering adherence to the regime's core policies is unmistakably clear. Until the international community holds the Iranian regime accountable for its actions, the world will continue to suffer the consequences of these dangerous and destabilizing policies.

### [A Strategy Built on Fear of Uprisings](#)

In a startling turn of events, the acceptance of Masoud Pezeshkian as a presidential candidate in Iran's recent elections reveals the depth of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's

fear of a popular uprising and potential regime overthrow. This fear was starkly evident in Khamenei's July 3rd speech, where he made an unprecedented admission about the election boycott.

In a departure from typical rhetoric, Khamenei acknowledged the widespread boycott of the presidential elections. He stated, "In the first stage of the elections, the people's participation was less than what we expected and predicted."<sup>30</sup> The boycott was so extensive that even the so-called reformist faction, traditionally seen as the regime's-controlled opposition, initially refused to participate in the parliamentary elections. This unprecedented level of non-participation forced Khamenei to recalibrate his strategy.

Confronted with the challenge of producing credible high voter turnout without the cooperation of the opposing faction, Khamenei chose to permit Pezeshkian a politically lightweight figure within the regime's elite, who did not have the clout or the will to challenge him on any issue, to enter the race, thereby crafting an illusion of robust participation and legitimacy. Consequently, the regime was poised to manipulate the vote count to assert a nearly 50% voter turnout—a stark distortion intended to veil the truth that over 91% of the populace had boycotted the elections.

Thus, Pezeshkian's candidacy and his subsequent "election" as president emerge from Khamenei's urgent endeavour to uphold an appearance of political diversity, all while concealing the real magnitude of public dissatisfaction. This scenario underscores the regime's precarious act of balancing, driven by an intensifying fear of the population.

The acceptance of Pezeshkian and the elaborate charade surrounding the election process clearly demonstrate the depth of Khamenei's fear. As the Iranian people continue to express their dissatisfaction through boycotts and protests, the regime finds itself resorting to ever more complex machinations to maintain its grip on power.

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<sup>30</sup> "Khamenei: People's Participation is the Backbone and a Source of Pride for the State," ISNA News Agency, 3 July 2024. Available in Farsi at: <https://www.isna.ir/news/1403041308884/>

## Chapter 3

### Europe's Failed Iran Policy

For over four decades, the European Union has pursued a policy of engagement and dialogue with Iran, hoping that maintaining open channels of communication would lead to internal reforms and moderation of the regime's behaviour. However, a close examination of Iran's actions over this period reveals that this approach has been an abject failure, amounting to little more than misguided appeasement that has emboldened the regime's worst instincts and behaviours. From egregious human rights violations at home to sponsorship of terrorism abroad, Iran has consistently flouted international norms while facing minimal consequences from Europe.

#### A Historical Perspective

The 1990s saw the introduction of the "critical dialogue"<sup>31</sup> approach, which aimed to address pressing concerns such as human rights violations and state-sponsored terrorism while simultaneously maintaining open diplomatic channels.

The presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) was widely perceived as a potential watershed moment in Iran's relations with the West<sup>32</sup>. Khatami's rhetoric, emphasizing moderation and reform, struck a chord with many Western observers. There was a prevailing hope that engaging with Khatami's administration would foster a more moderate and cooperative Iranian state. "Critical dialogue" evolved into "constructive dialogue."

However, this period of optimism proved to be short-lived. Despite Khatami's reformist image, the fundamental power structures of the Iranian regime remained firmly entrenched. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei continued to wield ultimate authority, while conservative factions within the government maintained their considerable influence. The European strategy of appeasement and concessions failed

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<sup>31</sup> Patrick Clawson, "Europe's 'Critical Dialogue' with Iran: Pressure for Change," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 9 April 1997. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/europes-critical-dialogue-iran-pressure-change>

<sup>32</sup> Robin Wright, "Iran's Khatami Fosters Climate of Change," The Los Angeles Times, 25 May 1998. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1998-may-25-mn-53371-story.html>

to elicit the desired changes in Iran's behaviour. Instead, this approach inadvertently provided the regime with the time and latitude to consolidate its position both domestically and regionally.

A brief review of the past four decades reveals that the regime not only resisted behavioural change but also expanded its aggressive regional activities, adopted hostage-taking as a cornerstone of its foreign policy, advanced its nuclear ambitions, and continuously intensified internal repression and human rights violations.

### Pattern of Terrorism and Hostage-Taking

The Iranian regime has persistently used terrorism and hostage-taking as core pillars of its foreign policy. A comprehensive examination of Iran's actions since the 1979 revolution reveals a clear pattern: whenever Western nations have attempted to appease the regime through concessions or negotiations, it has only emboldened Iran to escalate its malign activities. Iran's strategy of terror and extortion has evolved over time, and policies of engagement have repeatedly failed to moderate the regime's behaviour.

Iran's use of hostage-taking as a political weapon began almost immediately after the 1979 revolution, with the seizure of the U.S. embassy<sup>33</sup> in Tehran. This 444-day hostage crisis set the template for Iran's future tactics. By holding 52 American diplomats and citizens hostage, the new Islamic regime was able to consolidate power domestically, gain international leverage and attention, and extract concessions.

The success of this strategy taught Iran's leaders a dangerous lesson - that hostage-taking could be an effective means of achieving political goals. In the decades that followed, Iran would repeatedly return to this playbook.

**Expansion of Hostage-Taking (1980s-1990s):** Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Iran expanded its use of hostage-taking across the Middle East and beyond.

**Multiple Kidnappings of Westerners in Lebanon:** During the Lebanese Civil War, Iran-backed Hezbollah was responsible for the kidnapping of numerous Westerners, including journalists, diplomats, and educators<sup>34</sup>. These kidnappings were often used as bargaining chips for political and financial gains by Iran.

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<sup>33</sup> Matthew Miller, Press Statement, The 44<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, 4 November 2023, United States Department of State. Available at:

<https://www.state.gov/the-44th-anniversary-of-the-takeover-of-the-u-s-embassy-in-tehran/>

<sup>34</sup> "An Overview of Iran's History of Hostage-Taking and how Western Appeasement has Fueled Tehran's Terrorism," NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 6 September 2022, Available at:

- **Iran-Contra Affair (1985-86)**<sup>35</sup>: The U.S. secretly sold weapons to Iran in exchange for hostages held in Lebanon, demonstrating the extent to which Western nations would go to secure the release of their citizens. According to the Tower Commission report, part of the deal was to label the principal opposition, the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI/MEK) as terrorist.
- **French Hostage Crisis (1986-87)**<sup>36</sup>: France made political concessions to Iran and allegedly paid ransoms to free French hostages in Lebanon, reinforcing Iran's belief in the effectiveness of hostage-taking. The main political concession was to exert pressure on the PMOI/MEK to restrict their activities and presence in France.

### Expanding Tactics in the 2000s to 2020s

As Iran's nuclear program became a growing international concern in the 2000s, the regime adapted its tactics. It began using detained dual nationals as bargaining chips in nuclear negotiations. Iran has consistently tied the fate of these detainees to sanctions relief and other concessions. Western nations' willingness to negotiate over hostages has once again signalled to Iran that its strategy is effective.

### Recent Developments: The Ongoing Cycle

In recent years, the pattern of Iranian aggression followed by Western appeasement continues:

- **UK Debt Payment (2022)**<sup>37</sup>: The UK paid a £400 million debt to Iran, coinciding with the release of two British-Iranian hostages. This incident underscored Iran's continued use of economic leverage in hostage situations.

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<https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/publications/special-reports/an-overview-of-irans-history-of-hostage-taking-and-how-western-appeasement-has-fueled-tehrans-terrorism/>

<sup>35</sup> "Understanding the Iran-Contra Affairs," The Brown University. Available at:

[https://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding\\_the\\_Iran\\_Contra\\_Affair/iran-contra-affairs.php](https://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/iran-contra-affairs.php)

<sup>36</sup> "France's Hostage Crisis Turns Election into Emotional Test of Socialists' Rule," The Los Angeles Times, 13 March 1986. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-03-13-mn-19597-story.html>

<sup>37</sup> "How is a UK Debt to Iran Connected to Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe?" BBC.COM, 17 March 2022. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-56376852>

- **Belgium Hostage Exchange (2023)**<sup>38</sup>: Belgium released Assadollah Assadi, a convicted terrorist, in exchange for a Belgian citizen taken hostage by Iran. Assadi had been convicted of planning a major terrorist attack in Europe, yet his release highlighted the lengths to which Western nations would go to secure their citizens' freedom.
- **Sweden Hostage Exchange (2024)**<sup>39</sup>: The Swedish government released Hamid Noury, convicted for his role in the massacre of political prisoners, in exchange for two Swedish citizens taken hostage by Iran. This recent exchange again emphasized the cyclical nature of Iranian tactics and Western responses.

### Terrorism as a Pillar of Iran's Foreign Strategy and Repression

Terrorism has always been used by the Iranian regime to pursue its objectives and eliminate its opponents outside Iran. The first and most devastating large-scale terrorist operation was the 1983 Beirut barracks bombing, which killed 241 U.S. and 58 French peacekeepers<sup>40</sup>. This act of terrorism was executed by Hezbollah, a Lebanese militia created and heavily supported by Iran, demonstrating Iran's willingness to use proxy groups to further its agenda.

Another such large-scale terrorist attack was the 1994 Bombing of a Jewish Community Centre in Buenos Aires<sup>41</sup>. This attack, which killed 85 people and injured hundreds, was orchestrated by Tehran and conducted by Hezbollah. It illustrated Iran's reach and willingness to target civilian populations far beyond the Middle East.

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<sup>38</sup> "Iran-Belgium Prisoner Swap Denounced as 'Shameful,'" Deutsche Welle, 26 May 2023- Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/iran-belgium-prisoner-swap-denounced-as-shameful/a-65744497>.

<sup>39</sup> "Sweden and Iran Exchange Prisoners in Breakthrough Deal," Reuters, 16 June 2024. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/sweden-iran-carry-out-prisoner-swap-officials-say-2024-06-15/>

<sup>40</sup> "On October 23, 1983, Hizballah killed 241 U.S. military personnel, including 220 Marines, 18 sailors, and three soldiers in a terrorist bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. Minutes later, a second suicide bomber killed 58 French paratroopers. Six innocent Lebanese civilians also lost their lives" U.S. Department of State- Available at: <https://www.state.gov/40th-anniversary-of-the-beirut-marine-corps-barracks-bombing/#:~:text=On%20October%201983%20Hizballah,civilians%20also%20lost%20their%20lives>

<sup>41</sup> "Argentina Court Blames Iran for Deadly 1994 Bombing of Jewish Center," Reuters, 12 April 2024. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/argentina-court-blames-iran-deadly-1994-bombing-jewish-center-2024-04-12/>

In each case, Iran was able to maintain plausible deniability by operating through proxies like Hezbollah. When Western nations responded with attempts at diplomacy rather than forceful action, it reinforced Iran's perception that terrorism was a low-risk, high-reward strategy.

## Terrorism on European Soil

Perhaps most alarming is how Iran has repaid Europe's policy of engagement by sponsoring terrorist attacks on European soil. In June 2018, European authorities foiled an Iranian plot to bomb the National Council of Resistance of Iran's rally near Paris<sup>42</sup> that was attended by numerous Western political figures. Assadollah Assadi<sup>43</sup>, an Iranian diplomat based in Vienna was arrested for providing explosives to the would-be bombers.

When Assadollah Assadi, jailed for 20 years in Belgium for the terrorist bomb plot, was released in a farcical deal with the Iranian regime and returned to a hero's welcome in Tehran, many thought the EU's appeasement policy had reached rock bottom. Warnings were sounded that the release of Assadi would embolden the mullahs to attempt a further bomb attack or assassination attempt on European soil. The warnings were ignored and sure enough, in November 2023, a hitman financed by the Iranian regime attempted to assassinate Alejo Vidal Quadras<sup>44</sup>, former senior vice president of the European Parliament, and President of the International Committee In Search of Justice, who was shot in the face, in broad daylight, outside his home in Madrid. He miraculously survived.

Yet even after these brazen attacks on European territory, EU leaders continued to push for more engagement and dialogue with Tehran. This failure to impose serious consequences for Iran's terrorist activities in Europe represented a dangerous dereliction of duty to protect European citizens.

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<sup>42</sup> "France Bomb Plot: Iran Diplomat Assadollah Assadi Sentenced to 20 years." The BBC, 4 February 2022. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55931633>

<sup>43</sup> "Iran: Diplomatic Terrorism, Anatomy of Iran's State Terror" NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee. 12 September 2022. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/diplomatic-terrorism-anatomy-of-irans-state-terror/>

<sup>44</sup> "Spanish ex-Politician Blames Iran for Attack in Which Was Shot," Reuters, 23 February 2024. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spanish-ex-politician-blames-iran-attack-which-was-shot-2024-02-23/>

On 23 February 2024, Dr Alejo Vidal Quadras, the former Vice President of the European Parliament, held a highly anticipated press conference at a media club in Madrid<sup>45</sup>, addressing a throng of both Spanish and international journalists. This marked his first public appearance following the terrorist attack targeting him in the Spanish capital.

In his statement, Dr Vidal Quadras categorized the assault against him as a blatant act of terrorism. He pointed fingers directly at the Iranian regime and its involvement in orchestrating the attack and criticizing its engagement in terrorist activities beyond its borders.

Characterizing Iran as a “religious dictatorship” and a “terrorist regime,” Dr Vidal Quadras accused Tehran of harbouring terrorists and facilitating their escape from justice. He highlighted a series of past incidents, including the assassinations of two representatives of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, namely Dr Kazem Rajavi in Geneva in 1990 and Mohammad-Hossein Naghdi in Rome in 1993, as well as terrorist activities like targeting the Jewish AMIA centres in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

### Iran's Persistent Terrorism in Europe

Iran has a long and troubling history of using terrorism on European soil to suppress its opposition. Over the years, numerous Iranian dissidents, activists, and opposition members have been targeted in a series of violent attacks orchestrated by the Iranian regime. These acts of terrorism are not only a flagrant violation of international law but also a grave threat to the safety and security of Europe. Presented here are highlights of a few incidents that showcase the regime's ruthless determination to eliminate its adversaries far beyond its borders.

### The Kidnappings in Istanbul

On 11 October 1987, Abolhassan Mojtahedzadeh and Mostafa Abrari, members of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK), were kidnapped in Istanbul by personnel from the Iranian embassy. While Abrari managed to escape, Mojtahedzadeh was found in the trunk of an Iranian embassy car near the Iran-Turkey border. He revealed that he had been interrogated and tortured by Iranian embassy officials,

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<sup>45</sup> “Former European Parliament VP Alejo Vidal Quadras Blames Iran's Regime of Terrorist Attack in First Press Conference Post-Recovery”, NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee. 23 February 2024. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/iran-resistance/former-european-parliament-vp-alejo-vidal-quadras-accuses-irans-regime-of-terrorist-attack-in-first-press-conference-post-recovery/>

including Manouchehr Mottaki, who later served as Iran's foreign minister from 2005 to 2010. Mottaki continued to travel freely around the world despite his involvement in this crime.

### Assassination of Abdol-Rahman Ghassemlou

Ghassemlou was leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, who was assassinated, along with two advisors, in Vienna, Austria, while negotiating with the Iranian regime's representatives on 13 July 1989. The negotiators/assassins were Mohammad Jafari Sahraroudi, an IRGC Commander and Ghafor Darjazi using the pseudonym of Amir Mansour Bozorgian, an intelligence officer. Sahraroudi was himself injured and was taken to hospital and Darjazi spent 24 hours in Police custody before both were sent to Iran. Sahraroudi later was promoted to the position of head of the Parliament protocol and advisor to the Speaker, and Darjazi was promoted to the Director of Security for IRIB under a different pseudonym. He was later involved in the assassination of NCRI representatives in Rome.

### Assassination Attempts in Turkey

On 14 March 1990, Hossein Mir-Abedini<sup>46</sup>, the Deputy Director of the NCRI's Representative Office in London, was attacked by gunmen on his way to Istanbul Airport. Shot in the abdomen, Mir-Abedini survived, but the gunmen attempted to assassinate him again while he was in a coma in the hospital. This relentless pursuit underscores the Iranian regime's determination to silence its critics.

### The Assassination of Kazem Rajavi

Dr Kazem Rajavi<sup>47</sup>, a representative of the National Council of Resistance of Iran in Switzerland and a human rights activist, was assassinated on 24 April 1990, near Geneva, Switzerland. In 2006, Swiss magistrates issued international arrest warrants for Ali Fallahian, Iran's former Intelligence Minister, and several other high-ranking Iranian officials in connection with the murder. This case remains a stark example of Iran's willingness to target high-profile dissidents abroad.

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<sup>46</sup> "Why Iran Tried to Assassinate Me -- And How I Survived," Forbes, 13 February 2017. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/02/13/why-iran-tried-to-assassinate-me-and-how-i-survived/>

<sup>47</sup> "Investigation Relaunched into Murder of Kazem Rajavi," SWI swissinfo, 28 September 2021. Available at: <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/investigation-relaunched-into-murder-of-kazem-rajavi/46985104>

## The Murder of Effat Qazi

Effat Qazi, the daughter of Kurdish leader Gazi Mohammed, was killed on 6 September 1990, in Sweden. A letter bomb intended for her husband, Amir Qazi, a Kurdish activist, detonated and killed her instead. This attack highlights the regime's indiscriminate approach to eliminating perceived threats, regardless of collateral damage.

## The Murder of Shapour Bakhtiar

Shahpur Bakhtiar,<sup>48</sup> the last Prime Minister under the Shah's regime was murdered on 6 August 1991. After fleeing Iran when the Shah's regime was overthrown, he went to Paris and formed the National Movement of the Iranian Resistance. An Iranian agent who had infiltrated his group and gained his trust along with two other hitmen, who had accessed his heavily guarded compound in a Paris suburb stabbed him to death.

## The Mykonos Restaurant Assassinations

On 17 September 1992, Dr Sadegh Sharafkandi, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), and three aides were assassinated in Berlin's Mykonos<sup>49</sup> restaurant. The operation, orchestrated by the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), was a blatant act of state terrorism. Although two of the crime's masterminds were later released and deported by Germany, they were celebrated upon their return to Tehran.

## The Killing of Mohammad-Hossein Naghdi

On 16 March 1993, Mohammad-Hossein Naghdi<sup>50</sup>, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) Representative in Italy, was assassinated in Rome. Naghdi was ultimately killed in broad daylight by two terrorists on a motorcycle.

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<sup>48</sup> "Ali Vakili Rad: The Perfect Murder and an Imperfect Getaway," France 24, 19 May 2011. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20100518-ali-vakili-rad-perfect-murder-imperfect-getaway-shapour-bakhtiar>

<sup>49</sup> "Looking Back at the Mykonos Trial: The End of the Dispensable Iranian," DER SPIEGEL, 10 April 2007. Available at: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/looking-back-at-the-mykonos-trial-the-end-of-the-dispensable-iranian-a-476369.html>

<sup>50</sup> "A Look at Iran's History of Assassinating Dissidents," Alarabiya.net, 22 October 2018. Available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2018/10/22/A-look-at-Iran-s-history-of-assassinating-dissidents>

## The Attack on William Nygaard

William Nygaard<sup>51</sup>, head of Norway's second-largest publishing house, was shot three times outside his Oslo home on 11 October 1993, for publishing a book. A Lebanese national and a former senior Iranian diplomat were implicated in the assassination attempt, illustrating Iran's reach into Europe.

The regime's campaign of terror continued with the assassination of Osman Muhammed Amini, a KDPI member, in Copenhagen on 24 June 1994, and the murder of Zahra Rajabi, a senior MEK member, in Istanbul on 20 February 1996.

## Enabling Iran's Regional Aggression

Another major failing of Europe's engagement policy has been its inability to moderate Iran's aggressive behaviour and destabilizing activities across the Middle East. Iran has only grown bolder in its interventions and support for proxy forces, exacerbating conflict and humanitarian crises throughout the region.

Iran has funnelled billions of dollars into sponsoring proxy wars across the Middle East. Key examples of Iran's regional interference include:

- **Lebanon and Gaza:** Providing extensive support to Hezbollah and Hamas, perpetuating regional instability and conflict, which is now further endangering peace and security in the region and the world.
- **Yemen:** Arming Houthi rebels, fuelling a conflict that has resulted in a dire humanitarian crisis, and its continued attacks on commercial shipping, which in addition to its destabilizing impact on world trade, has cost billions of euros to protect the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, causing financial damage to several countries, including in Europe.
- **Syria:** Backing Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime, prolonging the civil war and contributing to widespread human suffering.
- **Iraq:** Controlling and influencing Shi'ite militias, undermining the country's stability.

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<sup>51</sup> "25 Years Later, Norway Files Charges in Shooting of 'Satanic Verses' Publisher," The New York Times, 10 October 2018. Available at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/10/world/europe/norway-satanic-verses.html>

On 7 October 2023, a new conflict erupted in the Middle East, catching many countries and analysts off guard. The sudden outbreak of hostilities raised critical questions about what went unnoticed and what should have been anticipated. Most analysts agree on a crucial point: The October attack would not have happened without the involvement of the Iranian regime. Following the death of Mohammad Reza Zahedi, the high-ranking commander of the IRGC in Syria, sources close to the Supreme leader publicly stated that Zahedi was involved in planning the attack. There is growing understanding that the Iranian regime is the head of the snake of warmongering and terrorism in the region.

### Iran's Direct Involvement in European Conflicts

The EU's long-standing policy of appeasement towards Iran came under intense scrutiny when Tehran's military drones began raining down on Ukrainian cities. The sight of Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones striking targets in Ukraine tells a dangerous story. Once again, the regime has been emboldened by what it perceives as Western weakness and indecision, expanding its malign activities not just in its immediate neighbourhood but directly into the heart of Europe. The use of Iranian drones in Ukraine<sup>52</sup> should serve as a wake-up call for European leaders, exposing the limitations and dangers of appeasement policies towards aggressive regimes.

### Iran's Ideological Commitment to Regional Dominance

On 3 December 2023, during a session titled "The Second National Conference on the Implementation of the Constitution," the Iranian regime's deceased president, Ebrahim Raisi, reaffirmed Iran's commitment to supporting Gaza and Palestine. He stated that this support aligns with constitutional principles, deeming support for the oppressed a crucial duty of the Islamic government. Since the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, a fundamental tenet of Iran's foreign policy has been to support the rights of the Palestinian people, recognizing this as a paramount issue in the Islamic world. Despite global political changes and regional inclinations, this foundational principle in Iran's foreign policy remains unwavering.

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<sup>52</sup> "The Iranian Drones Deployed by Russia in Ukraine Are Powered by Stolen Western Technology, Research Reveals," CNN, 28 April 2023. Available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/28/world/iran-drones-russia-ukraine-technology-intl-cmd/index.html>

## The Theocratic Imperative of Supporting Terrorism

The theocratic rule in Iran inherently involves supporting terrorism and extremist groups. Ruhollah Khomeini, the previous Supreme Leader and founder of the regime, famously stated, "Preserving the system is of the highest priority." His successor, Ali Khamenei, has emphasized this in recent years, stating, "If we don't combat terrorists in Syria or Iraq, we must confront them in the streets of Hamedan and Kermanshah."

Throughout the regime's history, regardless of economic conditions, political instability, or periods of war, Iran has consistently intervened in the affairs of other countries, driven by either diplomatic considerations or foreign policy priorities. Even during periods when administrations professed to pursue de-escalation and cultivate positive relations with the West, such as under presidents Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Khatami, and Hassan Rouhani, Iran maintained its engagement in the Middle East, North Africa, and Latin America.

## The Reality of Iran's Regional Ambitions

Over the past four decades, the Iranian regime has maintained a consistent approach, while the West has varied its strategy by seeking "moderates" or "rational elements" in Tehran. Unlike traditional tyrannical regimes, the adventurous agendas of the Iranian regime do not stem from inherent strength. This regime lacks critical foundations of genuine power, such as a robust economic infrastructure, widespread social support, and a sophisticated modern army and air force.

Therefore, destabilization beyond Iran's borders is not a power leverage but, as explicitly stated by Khamenei, a defensive strategy for survival<sup>53</sup>. Throughout more than two decades of nuclear negotiations, the regime has not been willing to discuss its ambitious regional plans, and Western negotiating parties have failed to grasp the reasons behind the regime's unwavering stance.

The lack of understanding of the Iranian regime's behaviour has incurred substantial costs, both in terms of lives and finances, for the region and the world. The regime neither wants nor can abandon its extremist policies, and no number of incentives or amount of pressure will persuade it to do so.

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<sup>53</sup> "Crisis and War in the Middle East: The Roots and Solutions," NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 2 January 2024. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/terrorism-a-fundamentalism/crisis-and-war-in-the-middle-east-the-roots-and-solutions/>

## The Failure of the Nuclear Deal

Since the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) revealed Iran's clandestine nuclear program in 2002<sup>54</sup>, European efforts to negotiate with Tehran have been continuous but ineffective. The discussions between the European troika (the UK, France, and Germany) and Iran aimed at curtailing its nuclear ambitions, but these negotiations only served to buy Tehran time to advance its program. Hassan Rouhani, who was head of the Iranian team negotiating with the EU3 wrote in a book that while they were negotiating, Tehran was advancing its program to further strengthen its position. From the beginning of the EU3 talks with Iran until 2013 when a new round of negotiation started, the Iranian regime pursued a policy of concealment and deception.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 nuclear deal negotiated between Iran and world powers including the EU, stands as a prominent example of the failure of Europe's engagement policy. European leaders hailed the JCPOA as a diplomatic triumph, claiming it would curtail Iran's nuclear ambitions while reintegrating Tehran into the international community. However, the reality was starkly different. Iran was allowed to maintain its equipment and continue enriching at low levels.

What is worse, even before the deal's ink was dry, Iran began violating the terms of the JCPOA by expanding its ballistic missile program, defying UN Security Council resolutions. German intelligence reports indicated that Iran continued smuggling components for its nuclear and missile programs, demonstrating no decrease in its efforts despite signing the deal. Critically, the JCPOA failed to grant the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors access to military sites controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), where much of Iran's clandestine nuclear work likely occurred.

The lifting of sanctions and unfreezing of assets provided Iran with a substantial financial windfall of over \$150 billion. Instead of using these funds to improve the conditions for its people, the regime redirected much of this money towards destabilizing activities across the Middle East. This included increased support for proxy forces and terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis in Yemen, and Shiite militias in Iraq. Rather than stabilizing the region, the deal made it less secure, contradicting the claims of its proponents.

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<sup>54</sup> "Iran's Nuclear Weapons Program," NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 24 September 2019. Available at <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/inside-source-reports/iran-s-nuclear-weapons-program/>

Despite clear evidence that Iran was violating both the spirit and the letter of the agreement, European leaders continued to champion the deal. Even after the United States withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018, European nations sought ways to preserve the agreement, while Tehran openly defied its obligations, including by enriching uranium up to 60%. The three European countries had the opportunity and legal instrument to force Iran to abide by its commitment by triggering the snap back mechanism but failed to do so. This misguided persistence in clinging to a botched deal has not only failed to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions but has also emboldened the regime to pursue its destabilizing activities with even greater vigour.

### Ignoring Human Rights Abuses

While pursuing engagement with Iran, the European Union has repeatedly downplayed or ignored the regime's atrocious human rights record. The ruling clerics have executed tens of thousands of dissidents. Among the most egregious of these abuses is the massacre<sup>55</sup> of over 30,000 political prisoners in 1988, predominantly members of the PMOI/MEK. This crime against humanity has never been properly investigated or punished.

On 17 July 2024, Javaid Rehman, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, issued a comprehensive report<sup>56</sup> calling for an international mechanism to investigate and prosecute those responsible for "atrocious crimes" committed in Iran. These crimes include the extrajudicial killing of thousands of arbitrarily arrested prisoners during the 1980s crackdown on political dissent, focusing on members of the PMOI/MEK.

In his report, Rehman detailed the widespread and systematic attacks against civilian populations by Iranian authorities between 1979 and 1988. He categorized these acts as crimes against humanity and genocide, including murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, torture, rape, persecution, and enforced disappearances.

Rehman highlighted the genocidal intent behind these actions, particularly towards the PMOI. He provided substantial evidence from statements and fatwas (religious decrees) issued by the then Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini, demonstrating a clear intent to destroy this opposition movement. The fatwas and official pronouncements

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<sup>55</sup> "1988 Massacre of Political Prisoners in Iran - A Crime Against Humanity," Justice for the Victims of 1988 Massacre (JVMI). Available at: <https://iran1988.org/1988-massacre/>

<sup>56</sup> "Iran: 'Atrocious Crimes' Must be Investigated, and Perpetrators Prosecuted, Says Special Rapporteur" OHCHR, 22 July 2024. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/iran-atrocious-crimes-must-be-investigated-and-perpetrators-prosecuted-says>.

categorized members and sympathizers of the PMOI as *monafeqin* (hypocrites) and *murtad* (apostates), justifying their extermination under religious pretexts.

The report states, “The specific requirements of the Genocide Convention and the challenges related to establishing genocide have already been considered. Khomeini’s fatwa, a key document of the 1988 massacre, lays bare the genocidal intent in physically destroying the PMOI, which was treated as a religious group by the perpetrators. The fatwa explicitly characterizes the PMOI’s alleged religious transgressions as 'waging war against God' that must be punished by execution.”

### Ongoing Atrocities and Impunity

The Special Rapporteur emphasized the extent of atrocity crimes committed during this period, noting: “The Special Rapporteur has received substantial evidence through testimonies from individuals, victims, and survivors, confirming the commission of large-scale 'atrocity crimes' in particular crimes against humanity of the mass murder, torture, enforced disappearances, and other inhumane acts as well as receiving evidence and submissions directing towards the crime of genocide.” The report substantiates these findings with verified documentary records, victims’ testimonials, and reports by civil society organizations, highlighting the systematic nature of these crimes.

Rehman stated that the massacre of political prisoners in 1988 is not merely a crime from the past; it is an ongoing atrocity because the families of the victims remain unaware of the fate of their loved ones. Moreover, the perpetrators of that massacre now hold high government positions and continue to commit such crimes.

In late 2019, Iranian security forces brutally crushed nationwide protests, killing over 1,500 unarmed demonstrators<sup>57</sup>. Thousands more were arrested, with many dragged from hospital beds to face torture and execution. Yet the EU's response to this bloodbath was muted at best. In the 2022 and 2023 protests, over 750 protesters were killed, thousands were injured and blinded by the IRGC and security forces, and 30,000 were arrested and tortured.

Even though the European Parliament adopted a resolution urging the EU to designate the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, the EU

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<sup>57</sup> Reuters News Agency, “Special Report: Iran’s leader ordered crackdown on unrest - 'Do whatever it takes to end it'”, 24 December 2019. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/special-report-irans-leader-ordered-crackdown-on-unrest-do-whatever-it-take-idUSKBN1YR000/>

refused to label the IRGC as a terrorist entity and continued its appeasement policy towards Iran.

By prioritizing economic interests and the nuclear deal over human rights concerns, the EU has signalled to Iran's rulers that they can abuse their own people with impunity. This failure to stand up for democratic values and universal rights has made the EU complicit in the suffering of the Iranian people.



## Chapter 4

### Misjudging the Ruling Theocracy

At the heart of Europe's bungled policy of engagement with Iran lies a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the Iranian regime. Unlike conventional political systems, Iran is governed by a theocratic framework rooted in the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih*, or absolute clerical rule. This doctrine endows the Supreme Leader with ultimate authority, basing political legitimacy on proclaimed religious principles rather than popular sovereignty or democratic choice.

The regime's ideological foundation inherently resists reform. The Supreme Leader's absolute power is intertwined with the very essence of the regime's identity. Any substantial reform that challenges this central authority would undermine the regime's ideological base, threatening its stability and survival. Moreover, historical precedents, such as the Shah's overthrow in 1979, reinforce the current regime's belief that reform could lead to collapse.

Key institutions, such as the Guardian Council, the IRGC, and the Supreme Leader's office, are populated by individuals who are staunchly loyal to the regime. These bodies play a critical role in maintaining the regime's grip on power and are inherently opposed to reforms that could weaken their control.

The regime's economic model is deeply intertwined with the interests of powerful and undemocratic entities, such as the IRGC. These entities control significant portions of Iran's economy and benefit from a lack of transparency and the absence of rule of law. Economic reforms aimed at liberalization and anti-corruption measures would threaten the entrenched interests of these powerful groups.

Another major reason for the failure of Europe's policy towards Iran is its tactical and short-sighted focus on temporary commercial interests. By prioritizing trade and economic benefits, European leaders have consistently overlooked or downplayed Iran's human rights abuses and its destabilizing actions in the Middle East. This short-sighted approach has allowed the regime to continue its repressive policies and aggressive behaviour while reaping the benefits of European trade and investment.

Yet an additional key reason for Europe's failed policy is the consequences of its policy of appeasement. This approach has provided numerous opportunities for the Iranian regime to act with impunity, particularly concerning human rights violations, regional warmongering, and global terrorism. The lack of meaningful consequences for Iran's actions has only emboldened the regime, allowing it to continue its activities without fear of repercussions.

### Iran's Influence on European Perspectives

Recent revelations about the regime's "Iran Experts Initiative" (IEI)<sup>58</sup> have cast further doubt on the effectiveness of Europe's approach. According to leaked documents and reports, the IEI was established by Iran's Foreign Ministry in 2014 with the goal of cultivating a network of academics and researchers in Western institutions, particularly in Europe. This initiative aimed to promote views favourable to Iran, especially regarding its nuclear program and regional role.

Key aspects of the IEI's European focus include:

1. **Targeting European Think Tanks:** The initiative sought to place sympathetic voices in respected European institutions, potentially influencing policy discussions and decisions.
2. **European Funding:** The IEI received funding from various European institutions and governments, raising concerns about financial ties that could have influenced European perspectives.
3. **Academic Involvement:** European academics, such as Adnan Tabatabai in Germany, were reportedly involved in the initiative. Tabatabai allegedly offered to ghost-write articles for Iranian officials, potentially shaping public and academic discourse.
4. **Conference Participation:** IEI members were encouraged to participate in European conferences and events, providing opportunities to promote Iran-friendly narratives.

The existence of the IEI suggests that the regime was actively working to shape the terms of Europe's engagement policy to its advantage. This manipulation underscores the vulnerabilities in Europe's approach and highlights the need for a more critical and informed strategy.

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<sup>58</sup> "Tracing Iran's Web of Influence in European Politics," NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee, 26 November 2023. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/iran-resistance/demonizing-mek/tracing-irans-web-of-influence-in-european-politics/>

## The Missing Link

A critical element has consistently been absent from Europe's policies: the voice of the Iranian people and their democratic opposition. This oversight has not only hindered the potential for meaningful change within Iran but has also undermined the effectiveness of European policy in the region.

European policy towards Iran has been based on a flawed premise, that change would come from within the regime itself. This approach, influenced by regime lobbyists and short-term economic interests, assumed that by granting concessions, the regime would reform internally. Consequently, European policymakers have largely ignored the Iranian people and their legitimate resistance movement. This policy has significantly undermined the potential for democratic change in Iran. By marginalizing the voices of the Iranian opposition, Europe has inadvertently strengthened the regime's hold on power.

Some also often suggest that the downfall of the mullahs' regime in Iran would plunge the nation into the kind of chaos witnessed in Libya following Gaddafi's ouster or in Iraq after Saddam Hussein's defeat. However, this comparison overlooks the profound differences in social, cultural, and political structures between Iran and these Arab nations. Iran's society, with its deep historical roots, experience with nationhood, distinct cultural identity, and long-standing struggle for freedom, is fundamentally different.

Moreover, Iran benefits from a well-organized opposition, both in exile and within the country, that is poised to guide the nation through a peaceful and orderly transition to democracy. This opposition is not a fractured or nascent force, but a mature and cohesive movement with the strategic vision necessary to prevent the vacuum of power and descent into anarchy that befell Libya and Iraq. Unlike the disarray that characterized those transitions, the Iranian opposition is equipped to provide stability, ensuring that the fall of the current regime would lead not to chaos, but to a new era of governance grounded in democratic principles and respect for the rule of law.

## The Iranian Struggle for Democracy

The people of Iran have long been at the forefront of resistance against their repressive regime. Despite facing brutal suppression, they have repeatedly demonstrated their desire for democratic change. The uprisings of the past six years, particularly the 2022 uprising, have clearly shown that the Iranian people are willing to pay a high price for regime change and the establishment of a democratic republic. Iranian women and

youth have displayed unparalleled courage, revealing to the world that the clerical regime is not only the enemy of its own people but also a threat to global stability.

Furthermore, the regional conflict that erupted on October 7, 2023, and its subsequent expansion through Iran's proxy forces in the Red Sea, Yemen, Lebanon, and even within Iran itself, has precipitated a major global crisis. This situation has starkly illustrated to the international community that achieving peace and stability in the region is inextricably linked to regime change in Iran.

The Tehran regime, acutely aware of this dynamic, has been proactive in shaping the narrative surrounding its opposition. Through extensive lobbying efforts, media manipulation, and economic leverage, it has worked tirelessly to discredit and isolate the main opposition groups, particularly the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK) and the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)<sup>59</sup>. The regime's strategy has been to propagate the notion that it faces no viable alternative, thereby compelling Western powers to engage with the current regime as the only option for diplomacy and stability in the region.

Recent years have made it evident that with the Iranian people ardently seeking a change in regime, the theocracy's grip on power relies solely on suppression. The IRGC and other security forces brutally suppress any signs of dissent. Consequently, many protests, while powerful, would be easily quashed without proper organization and leadership.

This is where the role of organized resistance becomes crucial. An organized movement can sustain momentum over time, maintain continuous pressure on the regime, and prevent authorities from regaining control and fully suppressing dissent. The MEK has played a pivotal role in this regard by organizing and sustaining powerful nationwide uprisings through the formation of Resistance Units,<sup>60</sup> despite bearing the brunt of extreme repression.

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<sup>59</sup> "National Council of Resistance of Iran – The Viable Democratic Alternative," NCR Foreign Affairs Committee, 24 September 2019. Available at: <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/about-ncri/ncri/alternative/>

<sup>60</sup> "How PMOI Resistance Units Are Shaping Iran's Democratic Future," The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), 1 August 2024. Available at: <https://english.mojahedin.org/article/how-pmoi-resistance-units-are-shaping-irans-democratic-future/>

Resistance Units are essential components in the fight against the Iranian regime. These multi-person teams, embedded in neighbourhoods, schools, and factories across Iran, guide, organize, and ignite uprisings.

These units provide guidance and organization to dissidents, ensuring that protests are not only sparked but also sustained and strategically directed for maximum impact. By taking on significant risks to challenge the regime, Resistance Units represent the collective will of 85 million Iranians, shifting the balance of power significantly against the theocracy.

### The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)

Contrary to the regime's false narratives of "no Alternative," the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) has emerged as a formidable and credible alternative. As Iran continues to grapple with authoritarian rule, widespread human rights violations, and international isolation, the NCRI stands out as a beacon of hope for millions of Iranians yearning for freedom and democracy. The NCRI is widely regarded as a viable alternative due to its structure, support base, leadership, vision, and growing capabilities.

#### **1. Organizational Structure and Network**

The NCRI possesses a robust organizational structure with strong internal cohesion and effective leadership. Its extensive network of members and supporters both inside and outside Iran enables it to mobilize various segments of society against the ruling regime. This organized entity acts as an engine for change, capable of leading, guiding, and growing anti-regime activities and uprisings.

#### **2. Domestic and International Support**

The NCRI has garnered significant support both within Iran and internationally. Its legitimacy stems from the price it has paid in the struggle for freedom, evidenced by the numerous martyrs and prisoners affiliated with the movement. This popular base is crucial for any alternative seeking to replace the current dictatorship. Internationally, the NCRI has gained recognition and support from personalities, parties, legislators, and officials across the political spectrum. This extraordinary global backing is essential for facilitating a democratic transformation in Iran and preventing unproductive foreign interventions.

#### **3. Competent Leadership and Roadmap**

The NCRI boasts competent and reliable leadership that has proven its capabilities during a long and arduous struggle. Unlike failed contemporary

movements, the NCRI's leadership has shown willingness to take risks and make historic decisions to advance the cause of freedom in Iran. Moreover, the NCRI has a clear plan of action for Iran's future. This plan addresses major societal issues, guarantees individual and social rights, ensures women's rights and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, and outlines strategies for economic development and a peaceful foreign policy. The ultimate goal is to establish a democratic, secular, and non-nuclear republic.

#### **4. Commitment to Pluralism**

The NCRI represents a wide array of political tendencies and persuasions within Iranian society. It embraces pluralism, including representatives from various political ideologies, ethnic minorities, and religious backgrounds. This inclusive approach is crucial for addressing the diverse needs and aspirations of the Iranian people.

#### **5. Rejection of All Forms of Dictatorship**

The NCRI has clearly distanced itself from all types of dictatorship and authoritarianism. It emerged from the Iranian people's revolution against the Shah's dictatorship and continues to advocate for freedom and independence. The NCRI's legitimacy is derived from its steadfast resistance to the ruling dictatorship, setting it apart from groups that seek to reinstate the monarchy or merely reform the current religious dictatorship.

#### **6. Campaigns and Advocacy**

The NCRI has led extensive efforts to expose human rights abuses in Iran, reveal the regime's nuclear ambitions, and advocate for democratic freedoms. These comprehensive campaigns have contributed to raising global awareness about the situation in Iran and the need for change.

#### **7. Transitional Capability**

Perhaps most importantly, the NCRI has demonstrated its capability and commitment to lead a potential transition to democracy in Iran. Its clear vision, organizational structure and broad support base, position it well to guide Iran through the challenging process of establishing a democratic government following the clerical regime's overthrow.

## Chapter 5

### **The Imperative of a Revised European Policy**

The Iranian regime stands as a paramount threat to global peace and security. In response, Western governments have pursued a mix of strategies aimed at mitigating this regime's behaviour through unjustified concessions—financial aid, political compromises, and undue restrictions on Iranian opposition movements. These efforts have served only to embolden the ruling clerics, who have faced no repercussions for their myriad crimes and violations of international law, particularly concerning their nuclear ambitions.

The regime's confidence in its perceived strength is deeply rooted in four decades of what can only be described as an official policy of Western “appeasement” toward Tehran. This approach, characterized by ignoring increased oil sales and capitulating to hostage-taking tactics, has only fortified the regime’s belief that it can continue its aggressive policies without facing direct consequence.

Before the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) exposed two secret nuclear sites in Natanz and Arak in August 2002, Western governments made no serious attempts to address Tehran's nuclear advancements. Some European countries even continued technical cooperation with Tehran, inadvertently aiding the mullahs' nuclear ambitions. This complacency towards the "godfather of international terrorism" arming itself with nuclear weapons was not due to ignorance but a direct consequence of the policy of appeasement or, put more politely, “engagement”.

A confidential French government report, published in the Los Angeles Times in August 2003, warned that the regime was alarmingly close to having enriched uranium or plutonium for a bomb. The report urged other governments to exercise strict vigilance on exports to Iran and its front companies. Nevertheless, proponents of appeasement, driven by business interests advocating for trade with Tehran, persisted in improving ties with the Iranian regime while simultaneously attacking its opponents like the NCRI.

As Tehran accelerated its acquisition of nuclear bomb technology, the regime’s fundamentalism became a preeminent threat to global peace and security. European governments consistently released Iranian state terrorists under pressure from Tehran’s terror campaigns, perpetuating a vicious cycle that has never been broken. The regime

has continued its nuclear weapons program unabated. Activities such as the secretive SPND's direction of the nuclear weapons program, operations at the covert METFAZ testing site, and non-compliance with IAEA inquiries regarding highly enriched uranium, exemplify this persistence. Tens of billions of dollars returned to Iran under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) have been funnelled into weapons, terrorism, and domestic oppression.

The Iranian regime's progress toward nuclear weapons necessitates immediate referral of its nuclear dossier to the UN Security Council. The reinstatement of the six UNSC resolutions through the trigger mechanism is long overdue. Western policy towards the Iranian regime must undergo a profound and effective transformation.

### Reassessing Western Policy Toward Iran

Western nations, particularly those in Europe, face a profound strategic quandary regarding their policy toward Iran. The geopolitical importance of Iran's actions and the ramifications of its foreign policy decisions necessitate a thoughtful, effective approach from Western policymakers. However, the prevailing discourse often presents a false dichotomy: engage in seemingly futile negotiations or brace for the perils of military confrontation. This oversimplified perspective fails to capture the complexity of the options available and may inadvertently constrain policymakers to a limited set of responses.

Reports from international human rights organizations and on-the-ground observations reveal a regime that continues to suppress dissent vigorously, execute political opponents, and stifle freedoms. These harsh realities stand in stark contrast to the hopeful signs of societal liberalization often highlighted by European intellectuals. While public displays of affection or digital activism may suggest potential cultural shifts, they do not reflect a regime willing or able to implement meaningful political reforms.

The Iranian regime's foreign policy extends beyond regional meddling to include escalating terrorism in Europe, interference in Ukraine, and threats against European nations. Its tactics of hostage-taking highlight a facade of strength that conceals its deep-seated weaknesses and desperation to maintain internal control.

From Tehran's perspective, its foreign policy strategies have been markedly successful. The regime has adeptly expanded its regional influence, exploiting the strategic errors and miscalculations of Western powers. This expansion reflects a calculated effort to

solidify its perceived status as a “regional power,” challenging Western influence and complicating the global geopolitical landscape.

The notion that economic and diplomatic engagement could encourage moderate elements within the Iranian leadership to emerge has not materialized. In fact, the opposite has happened. The regime has used this period of appeasement to strengthen its internal repressive apparatus and expand its terrorist reign across the region. In essence, appeasement has made a military confrontation more likely, not less.

A third option exists that rejects both appeasement and military confrontation. The most significant missing link in the Western policy framework has been the neglect of the Iranian people and their organized resistance against the regime. Despite widespread societal discontent and numerous uprisings, Western policies have largely ignored the strategic leverage of the Iranian opposition.

Given the high stakes and the regime’s proven adeptness at exploiting geopolitical vulnerabilities, a responsible Western strategy must include a comprehensive assessment of all potential allies, including organized opposition movements advocating for a democratic republic. Such an approach should aim to foster a broader strategic dialogue that goes beyond the current paradigm. Disregarding these possibilities not only limits the effectiveness of Western policy but also fails to capitalize on potential opportunities to foster change from within Iran.

Iran stands as a unique case in the Middle East, distinguished by the presence of a substantial, well-organized alternative to its theocratic rule. This opposition is not only deeply rooted within Iranian society but also possesses a robust international network and a clear, actionable vision for a democratic future. It represents a viable path to stability in a region fraught with volatility, overshadowed by the regime's relentless warmongering and escalating terrorism.

In practical terms, the components of a new policy are: First, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) should be officially designated as a terrorist organization, reflecting its role in supporting international terrorism and destabilizing activities. Second, international sanctions must be rigorously enforced and expanded to pressurize the regime and curb its malign activities. Third, Western powers must reactivate the snapback mechanism and reinstate six UN Security Council Resolutions that dealt with Iran's nuclear program. Finally, it is imperative to acknowledge and support the Iranian Resistance's right to resist and seek democratic change.

The strategy for regime change in Iran can be enabled by international isolation of the regime. One of the most effective measures would be the complete severance of

diplomatic relations between the European Union and the theocratic regime in Tehran. This would involve closing all EU embassies in Iran and, reciprocally, shutting down Iranian embassies across EU member states. Expelling all of the regime's diplomats from European soil would send an unequivocal message of condemnation, stripping the dictatorship of its diplomatic channels used to justify its behaviour and further weakening its grip on power. Such a move would not only underscore the international community's refusal to legitimize the regime but would also amplify the voices of the Iranian people as well as internal pressures on the Iranian regime, hastening its inevitable collapse.

The integration of these elements into a cohesive strategy would not only serve Europe's long-term strategic interests but also uphold its commitment to democratic values and human rights and also provide a clearer path toward a stable and democratic Iran. The Iranian people and their resistance offer the missing link—an untapped source of potential that, if properly harnessed, could redefine the geopolitical landscape of the region and beyond.





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