

**UPDATE**

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## U.S. POLICY PRESCRIPTION FOR POST-KHOMEINI IRAN

(Updating *Backgrounder* No. 625, "Planning for Post-Khomeini Iran," December 27, 1987, and *Backgrounder* No 126, "Iran, the United States, and the Hostages: After 300 Days," August 29, 1980.)

The death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini has plunged Iran into mourning. It ultimately may plunge Iran into chaos. But Khomeini's death will have little immediate ameliorating impact on Iran's revolutionary foreign policy. In fact, Iran's hostility to the United States and the West actually may increase because of the ongoing Iranian succession struggle. Rival Iranian leaders, seeking to enhance their revolutionary credentials and stake their claim to Khomeini's political legacy, already are competing in denouncing America, branded repeatedly as the "Great Satan" by Khomeini. Growing factionalism in Tehran may lead to increased free lance terrorism among Iran's terrorist surrogate groups in Lebanon and elsewhere.

Khomeini was the glue that held Iran's revolutionary Islamic system together. He was the ultimate arbiter of policy disputes between contending Iranian factions. His death thus creates a leadership vacuum that eventually could destabilize Iran's Islamic government. None of Khomeini's lieutenants has the personal charisma, religious authority, or popular support that enabled Khomeini to set the course of Iran's revolution.

**Fundamentalist Triumvirate.** Iran's post-Khomeini domestic politics are likely to be dominated by three of Khomeini's longtime disciples. This triumvirate must lead an uncertain Iran through thorny internal debates over the state's proper role in the economy, land reform, civil liberties, constitutional reforms, and Iran's revolutionary foreign policy.

The first member of the triumvirate, Hojatolislam Ali Khamenei, 49, has been designated to succeed Khomeini as Iran's supreme religious leader. Currently serving as Iran's President, Khamenei is a relatively junior cleric who lacks the personal stature to assume Khomeini's role as arbiter. Khamenei tends to take a radical approach to foreign policy issues, favoring greater cooperation with the Soviet bloc and radical Third World states. On domestic issues, he has moderated his previous support for state control of the economy, and now favors private sector and foreign involvement in rebuilding Iran's mismanaged and war-ravaged economy.

Iran's key power broker is Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, 55, the Speaker of Iran's Parliament, the dominant branch of government. A shrewd pragmatist, Rafsanjani advocates giving higher priority to the institutionalization of the Islamic revolution in Iran than to exporting that revolution. He pushed for Iran to downgrade its links with terrorist groups and normalize its relations with the world. He also was one of the "moderates" that secretly sought U.S. arms in 1985-1986. Although Khomeini defended Rafsanjani's contacts with the U.S. at that time, Rafsanjani was put on the defensive by Khomeini's scathing death threats against author Salman Rushdie last February. Rafsanjani is currently the only candidate for President in Iran's

August 18 elections. He is pushing for constitutional reforms that will strengthen Iran's presidency at the expense of the radical Prime Minister, Mir Hussein Moussavi.

The third member of the triumvirate is Ayatollah Khomeini's son, Ahmed, 44, who may assume increasing importance as chief custodian of his father's legacy. Ahmed is the most radical of the three, with close ties to other radicals such as Moussavi and the increasingly influential Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashemi. A former Ambassador to Syria charged with overseeing pro-Iranian Lebanese terrorist groups, Mohtashemi now controls much of Iran's powerful internal security apparatus. If backed by Ahmed Khomeini, he could emerge as Rafsanjani's chief challenger.

**Avoiding Accommodation.** As the political situation in Iran sorts itself out, Washington should maintain a cautious wait-and-see policy since the U.S. has little influence on events there. Washington should learn from its past experiences and avoid reaching out to "moderate" (least hostile) Iranian factions, for this only discredits them in the Iranian political arena, where an American connection is politically fatal. Instead of seeking a fragile accommodation with Iranian "moderates," the U.S. should focus on blocking the ambitions of Iranian radicals.

To do this, Washington should press its allies to ban trade and break diplomatic relations with Iran until Tehran has stopped supporting terrorism. There should be no concessions made to gain the freedom of the nine Americans and six Europeans held hostage in Lebanon by pro-Iranian terrorists. Their release should be a precondition, not a goal, for improved relations with Iran. Iran must not profit from the release of hostages because that would only strengthen Iranian radicals and encourage future hostage-taking. To deter future Iran-sponsored terrorism, the U.S. must retain the option of military reprisals. Iran will abandon terrorism only when the risks of terrorist operations outweigh the potential benefits.

Along with these sticks, Washington should extend the following carrots to Iran:

- ◆ ◆ Offer economic and technical assistance in rebuilding Iran's economy, particularly its oil industry, if Iran stops exporting terrorism and revolution.
- ◆ ◆ Offer to abstain from support of Iranian opposition and separatist groups in return for a curb on Iranian support for anti-Western terrorist and revolutionary groups.
- ◆ ◆ Offer cooperation against Soviet military and subversive threats. Soviet troops have occupied Iranian territory twice since the 1917 Russian revolution.

While American leverage on Iran in the short term remains limited to disincentives, over the long term the U.S. can offer Iran plausible incentives for moderating its aggressive foreign policy. The ultimate U.S. goal should be to establish a working relationship with a post-Khomeini Iran that disavows terrorism, ceases violent attempts to export its revolution, and functions as a buffer between the Soviet Union and the oil-rich Persian Gulf region.

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