

# Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

Written by Luke M. Herrington

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## Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

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LUKE M. HERRINGTON, JUL 28 2011

On 13 June 2009 the citizens of Iran—indeed, people all over the world—awoke to headlines announcing “Ahmadinejad wins surprise Iran landslide victory.” With a record 84% voter turnout in the Iranian presidential elections, Mir Hossein Mousavi, a former prime minister, was “expected to trounce [his] controversial incumbent” opponent. When the election results were announced by Interior Minister Sadeq Mahsouli, however, they showed that President Ahmadinejad had won reelection 62.63% to 33.75%.[1] Mousavi’s supporters in Tehran took to the streets immediately. The protestors found the election results intolerable and unacceptable, so they started hurling allegations of fraud, building barricades, linking together to form human chains, and burning tires and police motorcycles in the streets.[2] Throughout the heart of the capital protestors were looking to pick fights with the police. They waved green ribbons in support of Mousavi while chanting that “the government lied.” The Green Movement, as it has become known, was born.[3]

Though the movement lives on, the two years that have passed since that fateful day have been unkind. Analysts the world over have asked why the Green Movement did not succeed. Some believe it was simply not possible in the face of government suppression. The truth is, however, that a number of social, political, and economic barriers to regime change exist in Iran, and each has contributed to the perceived failures of the Green Movement.

What follows is a discussion of these barriers—impediments to the Green Movement’s success—and the opposition’s attempts to overcome them. For instance, it is important to understand the historical role Iranian clerics have played in revolutions, and how the theocracy’s very legitimacy formed a systemic barrier to the Green Movement’s demands for reform. Of course, the reformists tried to invoke Islam to gain legitimacy, but one might wonder if the absence of the clerics from the Green Movement doomed it from the beginning. Moreover, given that the regime could rely on oil exports to maintain its financial strength, one should be aware of any efforts the Green Movement may have made to gain its own economic legitimacy. Take, as another example, the fact that bazaars normally play a role in fomenting revolutions in Iran. Where were they in the aftermath of the 2009 election? Could they have given the Green Movement financial support, or deprived the regime of said support? Finally, some western analysts think that the regime may have utilized counterinsurgency (COIN) theory to crush the opposition before it could spark a revolution. While this is debatable, the regime did respond to the Green Movement with hard-handed tactics in a violent act of suppression. Considering this, and more, it will become apparent why the Green Movement has yet to succeed.

### **The Theocracy: Religion as a Structural Barrier to Change**

As noted, religious leaders have traditionally played a role in Iranian revolutionary activity. This began around 20 March 1890 when the Qajar shah, Naser al-Din, conceded a tobacco monopoly to Major G. F. Talbot, a British citizen. Talbot was granted the sole rights to buy, sell, and manufacture “all the tootoon and tobacco in the interior or exterior of the Kingdom of Iran for 50 years in return for an annual rent of £15,000, and a quarter of the annual profits after the payment of all expenses and of a 5% dividend on the capital.”[4] This led to the Iranian Tobacco Protest, which lasted until 1892, as merchants offended by the agreement invoked Islam in an effort to prevent the implementation of the concession. One Islamic principle invoked by the merchants was that buyers and sellers must

# Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

Written by Luke M. Herrington

each agree to a purchase. However, the concession mandated that Iranian tobacco growers sell their crops exclusively to Talbot, making it an un-Islamic accord. Eventually, the *ulama* partnered with the merchants, as mullahs began preaching against the concession.[5] The merchants, in collusion with Ayatollah Mirza Hasan Ashtiyani of Tehran, fabricated a *fatwa* and attributed it to Mirza Hasan Shirazi, Karbala's *Marja' Taqlid*, or grand ayatollah. It declared:

In the name of God, the Merciful and Forgiving. As of now, the consumption of tobacco and tootoon in any form is tantamount to war against the Imam of the age.[6]

Shirazi did not deny the *fatwa*, so a highly successful nationwide boycott ensued. At the end of January in 1892, the Shah cancelled the Talbot concession.[7]

The Constitutional Revolution (1905-1907) was no different. The *ulama* continued to play an important role in revolutionary activity as it partnered with dissenters against the regime. In the summer of 1906, during the month of Muharrem, an attempt by police to arrest anti-government preachers led to an outbreak of protests, during which, a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, or *sayyid*, was shot dead. The next morning, demonstrators—craftsmen, tradesmen, and theology students—“wearing white sheets as a sign of their willingness to die on a religious crusade” marched with the victim's body from Tehran's main bazaar to its central mosque for a public funeral.[8] The demonstrators clashed with a Cossack brigade, which resulted in twenty-two deaths. With this incident, the *ulama* started criticizing the regime openly. They compared Muzaffar al-Din Shah to Yazid, the infamous Sunni Umayyad caliph responsible for martyring the Shi'ah Imam Hossein. Consequently, the *ulama* went on strike. Religious leaders took their families and two thousand theology students to the shrine at Qum, ninety miles south of Tehran, leaving the country without “spiritual guidance... judicial decisions and legal transactions.”[9] As with the Tobacco protest, mounting pressure forced the Qajar shah to acquiesce to his people's demands. On 5 August 1906, he signed a proclamation authorizing the establishment of the National Assembly, and the new constitution was fully enacted by October the following year. [10]

Given the revolutionary role of the *ulama*, it is no wonder that when Reza Shah Pahlavi and his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, forced the top-down modernization and secularization of Iran[11] that the nation's clerics revolted. Take, for instance, the then-Supreme-Leader-to-be. “Ayatollah Khomeini,” in the words of John L. Esposito, was the Iranian Revolution's “living symbol and architect.”[12] Khomeini criticized the shah for being autocratic, corrupt, and unjust. The disgruntled ayatollah also lambasted the Shah's policies as promoting social inequality and foreign domination. During his exile, Khomeini's rhetoric sharpened. As his writings and tape-recorded sermons were smuggled into Iran, he continued to condemn the regime as illegitimate, as “anti-Islamic, as a regime based on unbelief,” and as “the object of *jihad*.”[13] Mounting pressure forced Mohammad Reza Shah into exile in mid-January 1979. The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) was founded on April 1 that year when people voted to establish the theocracy, and elected Khomeini as their supreme leader.[14]

The establishment of the theocracy thirty years prior to the disputed 2009 presidential elections placed clerics and other members of the *ulama* at the center of government, creating a systemic barrier to the Green Movement's success by depriving it of a historically critical revolutionary ally: mullahs and other religious elites. Like the bazaaris, or merchant class, of the Tobacco Protests a hundred years ago, however, members of the Green Movement, suggests the *New York Times*' Neil MacFarquhar, employ “religious symbols and parables to portray themselves as pursuing the ideal of a just Islamic state.”[15] They seek “the mantle of Islam... passionately and sincerely,” says Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, because “Islam remains a fundamental touchstone of legitimacy in Iran.”[16] Case in point, Mousavi demanded the justice promised by the Quran in the aftermath of the election, so he directed his followers to cry out from their roof tops, “Allahu akbar,” or “God is Great.”[17]

Moreover, the Green Movement has harnessed powerful Islamic symbols in an effort to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the regime, such as the color green.[18] More than the traditional color of Islam itself, green was initially used as the official color of Mousavi's campaign in an effort to emphasize his heritage. He is, after all, a *sayyid*.[19] Subconsciously speaking, the color green also harkens to the *Ta'zieh*, or the Persian passion play, which reenacts

# Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

Written by Luke M. Herrington

the tragedy of Karbala. At Karbala, Imam Hossein and his family were martyred by the Umayyad Caliph, Yazid, and his followers. Actors in the passion play usually dawn the color green to represent Hossein and his forces, while the followers of Yazid are depicted in red. This subconscious connection brings the legitimacy of Hossein to the Green Movement while simultaneously connecting Ahmadinejad to the tyranny of Yazid. In fact, the Hossein-Yazid “discourse” has been invoked many times, because when the Shi‘ah confront a regime, they turn to the Hossein story for legitimacy, motivation, and inspiration.[20] Beyond that, however, green is also described as a color of Persian nationalism: it was the official color of pre-Islamic Persian imperial armies, say some historians. With some of these things in mind, but especially Mousavi’s heritage, the campaign purchased huge rolls of green fabric so that they could use it to make flags, shirts, scarves, wrist bands, and more. So as demonstrators marched through the streets of Tehran decked out in green, the movement itself adopted the powerful symbol for its name.[21] In August, 2009, as the zeal of the protestors seemed to diminish, it became official. Mousavi and his supporters formally established the Green Path of Hope, the official political front—a structural, grassroots organization comprised of volunteers and independent social networks—meant to lead the Green Movement. In doing so, he exploited a loophole that requires the Ministry of the Interior to approve the establishment of a political party, while still appealing to the legitimacy of Islam through the color green.[22]

Some may argue that the appeals to Islam ultimately do not matter. These same individuals see Islam as *the* barrier to democratization, not just in Iran, but all over the Middle East and the Islamic World. In *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, Fareed Zakaria notes that some argue “what Islam needs is a clean break between church and state, its own version of the Reformation that will do for Islam what it did for the West.”[23] Bernard Lewis writes that Islam needs to build a wall of separation between the sacred and the sovereign to create separate spheres of influence for Islam and the Islamic World’s political leaders. Lewis does concede that Muslims may never initiate an event on the magnitude of the Protestant Reformation, but he says people should still hope.[24] Robin B. Wright, on the other hand, argues that the “seeds of an Islamic Reformation were actually planted a century ago” by a small group of obscure reform-minded clerics that wanted to figure out how to modernize and democratize in the context of Islam.[25]

To the contrary, Zakaria emphasizes that Iran, with its centralized clerical hierarchy, is really the only state within the entire Islamic World that could follow Lewis’ and Wright’s prescription.[26] Moreover, this concept makes the twin mistakes of, first, superimposing the experiences of Europe onto Iran, and of, second, generalizing the experiences of the theocracy in the context of the Islamic World. Nevertheless, it is not religious reform that will lead to democracy, suggests Zakaria, “but political and economic reform”; and this is exactly what the Green Movement is pursuing. Religion was not a barrier to the Green Movement. The absence of the clerical hierarchy did not doom it from the very beginning, though it certainly made reform more challenging. Still, this did not prevent reformers, opponents of the regime, Mousavi supporters, and others from appealing to Islam for legitimacy, and it certainly did not prevent some reform-minded spiritual leaders[27] from partaking in the Green Movement either.

In the end, it does not really matter. The election protests were not about religious reform, nor were they about regime change. Instead, according to Kevin Cross, they were sparked by “a passion for math.”[28]

## The Internet and Social Media

The Green Movement was about math for a simple reason. High voter turnout and election enthusiasm were indicators that Mousavi would win the presidential election. When the results were announced revealing how dramatic of a victory Ahmadinejad had claimed people all over Iran could not imagine how Mousavi could have lost, unless the elections had been rigged. They recognized, almost immediately, that their votes were essentially missing. This, of course, was the impetus of the Green Movement, and the source of the movement’s slogan, a motto that surely sent shudders through the edifice of the regime: “Where is my vote?”[29] After the election

[h]undreds of thousands of Iranians of all ages and walks of life chanted through the main avenue of Tehran, ‘Where is our vote?’ ‘Ahmadinejad, usurper of power,’ and the more daring, ‘Death to the dictator,’ a slogan chanted exactly thirty years ago by those students who brought down the shah regime.[30]

# Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

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The problem with the vote count was aggravated a few days after the election, when two Iranian filmmakers presented a letter apparently written by Minister Mahsouli to the European Parliament. Addressed to the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the letter clearly illustrates that the results of the election were forged. Per Khamenei's instructions, Mahsouli announced the election results "in accordance with the interests of the regime and the revolution" specifically to ensure that Ahmadinejad remain the president of Iran.[31] Although there is no way to know for sure, many believe the letter to be a forgery. Nevertheless, activists from the Green Movement view it as legitimizing their grievances, so they photocopied the letter to circulate at opposition rallies and protests.[32] And they cannot be blamed. If the letter is real, it shows that Mousavi, instead of losing by twenty nine percentage points, won the election with 19,075,623 votes to Ahmadinejad's meager 5,698,417 votes.[33] Copies of the letter inevitably ended up on the internet, and have helped solidify suspicions that Mousavi was deprived of the presidency by an elaborate conspiracy.

The internet has played an important role in the Green Movement, and in fact, the Mahsouli letter was by no means the first, or most influential, thing to be published online. According to Bruce Etling, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey, the most significant internet-related event in the aftermath of the election was the uploading of a video to YouTube "that documented the death of Neda Agha-Sultan." [34] Her death, even more than the release of the letter, was a critical moment "that spurred on the social movement by offering a rallying cry and a common narrative among its participants." [35] Given the regime's previous attempts to control the media, [36] and the difficulty of organizing in public, the internet offers an opportunity for dissenters to organize, communicate, and spread their ideas. Clay Shirky suggests that the internet and social media have allowed Iranian reformists to "coordinate with one another better than previously, [and] to broadcast events like Basij violence... to the rest of the world." [37] In terms of the media, social media outlets, such as Twitter and Facebook, were responsible for telling the story of the Green Movement *and* for molding it. [38] For example, Hamid Dabashi equates the Green Movement with "a cyberspace rebellion." He recalls receiving an e-mail on an iPhone from a student demonstrating in Tehran while on his way to an interview with CNN. Ten minutes later, notes Dabashi, he was using the student's e-mail in an analysis taped before a global audience. [39]

In spite of the Green Movement's apparently successful use of social media to confront the government, many journalists and scholars seem to believe that social media could be, at least in part, responsible for the failure of the Green Movement. The *Christian Science Monitor's* Scott Peterson notes that while websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, had become an important force in the effort to mobilize the movement, [40] the sites also made it easier for the IRI to quell dissent. In fact, says Peterson, "Iran's intelligence apparatus abroad was bolstered with battalions of agents" that launched a "global campaign of intimidation." [41] Iranian supporters of the Green Movement living in Los Angeles, Dubai, and even Sweden, received threats after "attending opposition rallies abroad, or for anti-regime comments made on their Facebook and Twitter accounts." [42] In fact, the *Wall Street Journal* even discovered that many people were being arrested and questioned in Iran because of the critical things their children and family members were saying on the internet while living abroad. [43]

Peterson goes further, saying that IRI officials would confiscate the passports of any Iranian returning to the country for a visit if they had posted any criticisms of the regime on the internet. Moreover, Iranian intelligence operatives were also responsible for intimidating activists abroad by videotaping rallies in Germany, where as many as 900 Iranians were being monitored by their own government. In Turkey, Green Movement refugees that had survived torture and rape in Iran were being accosted on the streets of Istanbul, beaten, "and subject to late-night visits that sent the frightening message: 'We are watching; you are not safe.'" [44]

Additionally, worries Evgeny Morozov, the internet affords authoritarian, totalitarian, and dictatorial regimes the world over with a new means by which to track, monitor, and identify dissenters. He even goes so far as to say that the Green Movement is an example of online organizing's impotence in the face of oppression. The regime, in one case, has started to produce video footage of fake Green Movement protests that show people burning the images of its leaders, thus creating confusion. In another case, supporters of the regime enabled the IRI's international intimidation campaign by cataloging anti-Ahmadinejad protestations they found online. Meanwhile, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard started posting photos of protestors taken at opposition rallies, and these same loyalists helped to identify them. The international media has not been solely a force for good, either. Though international news

# Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

Written by Luke M. Herrington

outlets have offered the Green Movement an unprecedented ability to share its story with the world, they have also enabled the IRI's internet crackdown. In one case, Iranian dissidents were secretly active on the website Goodreads, a social network for book enthusiasts. "Here," notes Morozov, "they quietly engaged in conversations about politics and culture, unseen by the censors," until the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the online community, incidentally informing Iranian authorities of their activity.[45]

Although there was so much initial excitement about the role of the internet in the Green Movement among foreign policy experts and journalists, these cases, and new data show that social media may actually have hindered the dissidents. According to Etling, Faris, and Palfrey, conversations about the Green Movement on Twitter mostly took place in the West, and the social networking site "most likely was not used by Iranians to organize." [46] In fact, they argue that the Mousavi campaign ineffectively tried to use Facebook to organize supporters before the June election. Moreover, since "[o]nline communities that congregate at a single URL are easily dismantled," all the government had to do to undermine the campaigns' efforts was block access to Facebook.[47]

There is no doubt that the internet was a double-edged sword for the Green Movement. But, the failures of internet organizing reached their climax on 11 February 2010. Iranian activists had planned what they called a "Trojan Horse." Mousavi supporters had used blogs, social networking sites, and e-mails to orchestrate a public act of defiance, in which they would reveal themselves to foreign journalists at a pro-government rally commemorating the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the IRI. The plan did not work, there was no big public reveal, and afterwards, "many of the greens" experienced "a sort of idealism hangover." [48] Cross notes that because the "movement has stumbled," optimism about social media and the internet shifted to pessimism, leading many to erroneously blame social media for the apparent failure of the Green Movement.[49] As noted, the regime's use of the same technology to harass dissenters represents the double-edged sword of internet organizing, but Cross' quantitative analysis shows that social media actually strengthened the Green Movement.[50]

Cross finds that traffic on Mousavi's Facebook page increased rapidly leading up to the election. Furthermore, he notes that traffic continued increasing after the election, while there was a general decline in Iranians visits to facebook.com (as a whole) immediately after the election. While many people beyond the borders of Iran certainly influenced the data, four factors, argues Cross, statistically show that the majority of traffic on Mousavi's Facebook page originated within Iran. First, Iranians have to rely on Mousavi's page because of the fact that the government continues to block all new sites that develop. Second, Google and Facebook did not introduce translation services until June 2010, meaning that visitors to Mousavi's page had to be able to read Farsi. Third, usage trends show that Mousavi's Facebook page responded directly to government manipulations of the internet, meaning that fewer people left comments when internet service slowed in Iran. Finally, Iranians using proxy servers to hide their origins from the regime certainly distorted the data, making it appear as if fewer Iranians visited facebook.com than really did.[51]

An Iranian-German, Mohammad Sadeghi, originally created Mousavi's Facebook page before the official campaign began. After the campaign launched, Mousavi's staff approached Sadeghi, who now administers the official Germany-based page. In the aftermath of the election, campaign staffers were hauled off to prison, which made Sadeghi recognize that he had a "responsibility to independently continue the campaign in Mousavi's name." [52] Accordingly, Mousavi's official Facebook page served "as a meeting place, conference room, and bulletin board for sympathizers and activists." [53] In fact, Sadeghi suggests that the Facebook page was instrumental "in propagating the defiant nightly 'Allahu Akbar' chant and organizing the protest schedule linked to" various major holidays.[54]

## Economic Barriers to Regime Change

The success of revolutionary activity in the past has not just been linked to the role of the clergy in Iran. Rather, since the Tobacco Protests, it has been linked to the alliance between the clergy and the bazaars, based on "close family, financial, and cultural ties." [55] Although the Green Movement has amassed protests the likes of which have not been seen since the 1979 revolution, unfortunately, it has not been able to garner the support of broad segments of society. Chief among those segments is the merchant class. In the summer of 2009, at the height of the Green Movement protests, pro-reform activists called for a general strike. However, merchants, for the most part, ignored

# Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

Written by Luke M. Herrington

the call to action. In his 2010 Norwuz address, Mousavi addressed this issue, saying that the Green Movement needed to expand to include labor groups, and Bazaar merchants. Then, when Tehran's main bazaar "shuttered its gates in July 2010 to protest an unexpected tax hike... [t]he greens anxiously watched but did not join up in support." [56]

Though the bazaar protests had nothing to do with the Green Movement, pro-reform activists watched them closely. Opposition leaders had hoped that the nation's economic issues would foment public discontent, and the bazaar strikes were the first real sign of trouble since the Green Movement's massive protests. Arang Keshavarzian, on the other hand, suggests that a revolutionary alliance between the two groups is unlikely, as there was no evidence to suggest that the strike was anything more than a defense of profit and economic interests. On top of that, reformers generally oppose Ayatollah Khamenei, given his support of President Ahmadinejad, while bazaaris and other influential groups still support the ayatollah. [57]

Still, such an alliance is not inconceivable, given that disparate groups have a habit of unifying during periods of revolutionary activity. After all, the Green Movement is not a group of "Westoxicated dreamers"; Mousavi's followers are angry about a "tanking economy and the president's failure to fulfill extravagant promises." [58] Even though the bazaar protests were not affiliated with the Green Movement, they did reflect economic tensions. Tax protests may not be new, but the fact that the 2010 bazaar strike led "to physical confrontations with security forces" is, and it illustrates "the perilous state of Iran's broader economy." [59] Common economic grievances could serve as an impetus that drives these groups closer together. Ahmadinejad, for instance, launched a "program to reduce subsidies for fuel, electricity and other basic goods," says Kevan Harris with *Time* magazine. Consequently, the government will provide \$40 every month, but inflation could mitigate this payment, which would really impact workers and merchants. [60] Nevertheless, forging a partnership will take time, and effort. Given the regime's economic stability, [61] if the Green Movement cannot partner with the bazaaris it will continue to falter.

## The Regime's Counterinsurgency (COIN) Tactics?

Dan G. Cox believes the Green Movement has failed, thus far, for two reasons. First, he argues that the movement itself is a budding insurgency, and that the IRI used Western counterinsurgency (COIN) theory to crush it. Second, he believes that a lack of clandestine support for the Green Movement from the West could lead to its ultimate failure. [62] Indeed, notes Stephen Kinzer, author of *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's Future*, the IRI has brutalized its citizens in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections. He argues that "[s]how trials, coerced confessions, jailhouse torture, closure of newspapers, and the use of thugs to beat demonstrators have become normal aspects of public life" in Iran. [63]

According to Cox, the regime's "extremely harsh COIN reaction" was implemented in two parts. [64] First, the regime cracked down on protestors using "the heavy presence of security forces in Tehran" to do so. [65] The streets were clogged with police and Basij militiamen, who were arresting (at least 1,000 greens were arrested over a period of two months), beating, and reportedly killing a number of demonstrators (which, of course, culminated in the death of Neda Sultan). [66] The second part was actually designed to control the flow of information. That is why the government slowed down the internet, blocked Facebook, Google's Gmail, and shutdown cellphone service. This had the result of making it very difficult to upload images and videos to the World Wide Web. It's the same reason foreign press were kicked out of the country altogether. [67] So, it was not the internet or social media that was a barrier to the Green Movement's success, rather, the IRI's COIN policies.

It is too early to resolve the debate over whether or not the IRI was actually using Western COIN (or whether or not the Green Movement actually represents an insurgency). However, Cox notes that the regime's actions fall well into line with the literature on COIN theory. For example, a successful COIN campaign must have a mechanism through which it can control the population, including police and military forces. Moreover, national leadership must resolutely utilize this mechanism to prevent a burgeoning insurgency from blossoming. This was seen in Iran, as the government had no reservations about deploying the Islamic Revolutionary Guard, the Basij militia, or police forces against Green Movement activists. [68] COIN theorists also stress the necessity of controlling information, propaganda, and the media, which has led Robert Haddick to claim that the "Iranian government is showing how to

# Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

Written by Luke M. Herrington

stop an insurgency before it gets started.”[69]

Maybe, at this juncture, the flaw in the Green Movement is its commitment to nonviolent civil resistance.[70] Of course a harsh COIN reaction could obstruct the greens as they take to the streets, if they are unwilling to take up arms against the regime. Right? In reality, says Robert Toscano, a former Italian ambassador to Iran, data shows that nonviolent social movements have proven more successful historically than violent movements.[71] Moreover, people are taking away the wrong lesson from the rebellion in Libya. Given the regime’s COIN tactics, many Iranians think that nonviolence does not represent a viable strategy in Iran. They say that they have more in common with Libya. However, suggests Karim Sadjadpour, the heartbreak of the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war has left no romantic notion “about a call to arms” in Iranian civil society.[72]

Skeptics of nonviolence argue that a Gandhian mentality cannot work in Iran. Iranians, after all, are “kebab-eating carnivores whose Shiite faith teaches [them] to take an eye for an eye,” not “pacifist, vegetarian Hindus.”[73] Nevertheless, Iranian philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo insists that the IRI’s violent suppression of dissenters means “that civic actors pose a serious threat to the ideological foundations of the regime.”[74] Finally, says Toscano, violence could not have served as the impetus that brought three million demonstrators to the streets of Tehran in 2009. Nonviolence can work, and the recent Jasmine uprisings that have swept through the Middle East, removing authoritarian regimes from power in Tunisia and Egypt, have restored a glimmer of hope to the Green Movement, which was left in despair after the regime’s crackdown.[75]

Without a doubt, the government’s violent reaction was a barrier to substantive change in Iranian politics. However, it illustrated that the nonviolent tactics of the Green Movement were threatening to the regime. Toscano and Jahanbegloo believe that the international community must take the time to vocally support the Green Movement. They note that nonviolent resistance movements usually fail without, at the very least, outside rhetorical support.[76] Cox, on the other hand, believes that the international community, namely the United States (U.S.), should covertly support the Green Movement in the face of the IRI’s COIN response. In fact, he suggests that the West provide material and economic support to the Green Movement. Without clandestine support, he reasons, it could fail and fade into obscurity.[77]

However, the international community needs to be cautious in its approach to supporting the Green Movement. Walid Phares criticizes U.S. President Barack Obama for not doing more to support the Green Movement. In fact, Phares charges Obama with the abandonment of the greens, suggesting that the president’s remarks regarding the protestors were “a blow to the demonstrators in the streets of Tehran.”[78] Mike Huckabee, a former Republican presidential candidate, complained that the U.S. was not doing enough to help the greens, noting that their signs were printed in English, a clear request for support.[79]

The U.S. has to be careful though, because it cannot be seen as meddling in the way that it had, for example, in the 1950s when the Central Intelligence Agency orchestrated a coup to remove the prime minister. Mistrust of outsiders is deeply ingrained in the Iranian national consciousness.[80] President Obama understood that Ahmadinejad would try to blame the U.S. for fomenting revolution, which is why he repeatedly stated that the U.S. would not interfere.[81] Even so, three days after the election, State Department officials contacted Twitter, and asked the social networking site to delay scheduled maintenance. As results, activists in Iran were able to use Twitter to coordinate their efforts while also informing the outside world of what was happening in the country. Had the maintenance gone forward as scheduled, it would have cut off service in Iran at a critical time.[82]

## The Green Path of Hope: Confronting the Real Barriers to Change in Iran

The Green Movement is a unique pro-reform civil rights movement that finds itself at odds with Iran’s ruling elite. Dismissing the movement as a failure, dead, or impotent would be an injustice to the people of Iran. Journalists, scholars, and policymakers, therefore, should recognize it for what it is: a movement—be it insurgency, revolution, or something else—in its infancy. Even using powerful, path breaking technologies, like the audiocassette, it took time for Ayatollah Khomeini to solidify opposition to Reza Shah Pahlavi. He started organizing in the early 1960s, approximately fifteen years prior to the revolution. So, everyone must remember that change in Iran will not happen

# Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

Written by Luke M. Herrington

over night.[83]

It will take time.

Though a number of social, political, and economic factors made it possible for the regime to initially resist the Green Movement, Mousavi's supporters carry on. Yes, clerical support would aid the Green Movement, but appealing to Islam for legitimacy has given the movement the moral authority to overcome this systemic barrier. Yes, the post-election protests revealed the weaknesses in organizing with social media, but the Green Movement has still largely used the internet to its advantage. Yes, the regime has been insulated from the protests by oil wealth, and the Green Movement would do well to ally with the bazaaris and other social groups throughout the nation to compensate. Yes, the violent suppression of protests in the aftermath of the election serve as a horrifying reminder of what the regime is capable of. Nevertheless, the Green Movement is alive and well, and it has already demonstrated that it can overcome the regime's most powerful weapon: fear. Change in Iran will take time because the Green Movement must overcome the real barriers to reform.

These barriers are structural. The Green Movement's lack of structure, hierarchy, and a well defined chain of command make it a difficult group to coordinate, control, and organize. Perhaps, Mousavi's Green Path of Hope can provide the institutional capacity to make the Green Movement into something more than just a disparate group of protestors. Perhaps, the Green Path of Hope can also serve as the catalyst for real change in Iran, by bridging the divide between the greens and bazaaris, clerics, laborers, and the various nationalities that inhabit Iran.

The recent Jasmine uprisings show that, with time and networking, undertakings, such as Iran's Green Movement can succeed (even without disavowing its core principles of nonviolent resistance). Even though the Green Movement does not hold de facto power in Tehran, therefore, it is important to remember that reformists still represent a viable, legitimate alternative to the ruling elite. The apparent failures of the Green Movement were only an initial setback; and the story isn't over yet!

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## Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

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[4] Mansoor Moaddel, "Shi'i Political Discourse and Class Mobilization in the Tobacco Movement of 1890-1892," *Sociological Forum* 7.3 (September, 1992): 459.

[5] Ibid., 460-461.

[6] Ibid., 464.

[7] Ibid., 459, 464.

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[8] Ervand Abrahamian, "The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10.3 (August 1979): 405.

[9] *Ibid.*, 405-406.

[10] *Ibid.*, 407.

[11] For a full explanation of the Shah's program of secularization, see Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011), 11-12; and John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 120-121.

[12] Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 187.

[13] *Ibid.*, 124, 188-189.

[14] Toft, Philpott, and Shah, *God's Century*, 12.

[15] Quoted in *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*, 12. Powerful artwork depicting moments such as these have been posted in various places on the internet. One artist, who calls herself Termeh, depicted the people of Tehran taking to the rooftops to scream "God is Great." Her work is available on her Facebook page, in Hamid Dabashi's *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA: The Fox and the Paradox*, and also on Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty.

[18] Interestingly, the color green was actually secretly selected as the color for the campaign by reformist activists two months before any reformist candidates announced their intentions to run for president. Green was selected because it stood for "good government," Islam, and it represented both Imam Hossein, and Imam Ali. Scott Peterson, *Let the Swords Encircle Me: Iran—A Journey Behind the Headlines* (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

[19] Associated Press, "Violence flares as Ahmadinejad wins Iran vote."

[20] John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 111-113; Rebecca Ansary Pettys, "The Ta'zieh: Ritual Enactment of Persian Renewal," *Theatre Journal* 33.3 (October, 1981): 353; and Akbar Ganji, "Akbar Ganji: My Advice for Iran's Green Movement," Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 6 January 2010, available from <[http://www.rferl.org/content/Akbar\\_Ganji\\_My\\_Advice\\_For\\_Irans\\_Green\\_Movement/1922322.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Akbar_Ganji_My_Advice_For_Irans_Green_Movement/1922322.html)>; Internet; accessed 29 April 2011.

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[24] Bernard Lewis, "Islam and Liberal Democracy: A Historical Overview," *Journal of Democracy* 7.2 (1996): 62.

[25] Robin B. Wright, "Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions of Reformation," *Journal of Democracy* 7.2 (1996): 66-67.

[26] Lewis and Wright are flawed in their assessment. Zakaria is right that Iran is one of the only countries in the Islamic World that could experience a Western-style Reformation. However, the findings of Toft, Philpott, and Shah, show that the states most likely to promote democracy are those with conflictual independent relationships between church and state. Said differently, Medieval Christendom and the IRI have consensually integrated relationships between church and state, meaning that they are theocratic in nature with the support of both secular and religious authorities, while countries, such as Kemalist Turkey or Communist Poland, had governments hostile to religion, making the religious groups more likely to promote democratic principles. Toft, Philpott, and Shah, *God's Century*, 39-42.

[27] For instance, Hamid Dabashi argues that two Shi'i clerics, Grand Ayatollah Montazeri and Ayatollah Sane'i, were integral "to the moral authority of the Green uprising at its earliest stages." Hamid Dabashi, *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA: The Fox and the Paradox* (New York, New York: Zed Books, 2010), 57.

[28] Kevin Cross, "Why Iran's Green Movement Faltered," *SAIS Review* 30.2 (Summer-Fall 2010): 169.

[29] Dabashi, *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA*, 53. Again, Termeh has illustrated this deftly. In one painting featured prominently in Dabashi's work, she shows the people of the Green Movement, asking in English, "where is my vote."

[30] Walid Phares, *The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East* (New York, New York: Threshold Editions, 2010), 243.

[31] Tucker Reals, "Does Letter Prove Iran Election Fraud?" CBS News, 19 June 2009, available from <[http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543\\_162-5095195-503543.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-5095195-503543.html)>; Internet; accessed 11 May 2011.

[32] Reals, "Does Letter Prove Iran Election Fraud?"

[33] Ibid.

[34] Bruce Etling, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey, "Political Change in the Digital Age: The Fragility and Promise of Online Organizing," *SAIS Review* 30.2 (Summer-Fall 2010): 44.

[35] Ibid.

[36] In 2003, and after, Iran engaged in a "Pasdaran war against satellite dishes," shooting them down with military helicopters (from a safe distance, of course). Phares, *The Coming Revolution*, 237.

[37] Clay Shirky, "The net advantage," *Prospect*, 11 December 2009, available from <<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2009/12/the-net-advantage/>>; Internet, accessed 1 April 2011.

[38] Cross, "Why Iran's Green Movement Failed," 169.

[39] Dabashi, *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA*, 108.

[40] Peterson, *Let the Swords Encircle Me*, 530.

[41] Ibid., 620.

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Written by Luke M. Herrington

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 620-621.

[45] Evgeny Morozov, "How dictators watch us on the web," *Prospect*, 18 November 2009, available from <<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2009/11/how-dictators-watch-us-on-the-web/>>; Internet; accessed 13 May 2011; and Evgeny Morozov, "Why the internet is failing Iran's activists," *Prospect*, 5 January 2010, available from <<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2010/01/why-the-internet-is-failing-irans-activists/>>; Internet; accessed 13 May 2011.

[46] Etling, Faris, and Palfrey, "Political Change in the Digital Age," 44.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Cameron Abadi, "Iran, Facebook, and the Limits of Online Activism," *Foreign Policy*, 12 February 2010, available from <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/02/12/irans\\_failed\\_facebook\\_revolution](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/02/12/irans_failed_facebook_revolution)>; Internet; accessed 1 May 2011.

[49] Cross, "Why Iran's Green Movement Faltered," 170.

[50] Ibid., 170-173.

[51] Ibid., 171-173.

[52] Abadi, "Iran, Facebook, and the Limits of Online Activism."

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2003), 227.

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[58] Peterson, *Let the Swords Encircle Me*, 474.

[59] Keshavarzian, "Ahmadinejad the Weak."

[60] Harris, "Iran: Why Workers Aren't Joining."

## Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

Written by Luke M. Herrington

[61] Cross discusses this thoroughly, arguing that the “strength of Iran’s petroleum economy” was responsible for insulating “the regime from protest activity.” Cross, “Why Iran’s Green Movement Faltered,” 170, 183-185.

[62] Dan G. Cox, “Unrest in Iran: A Test Case for Counterinsurgency Theory,” *Small Wars Journal* (7 February 2010): 1, 8.

[63] Stephen Kinzer, *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America’s Future* (New York, New York: Times Books, 2010), 216.

[64] Cox, “Unrest in Iran,” 1-2.

[65] Robert Haddick, “This Week at War: Are the Ayatollahs Using COIN?” *Foreign Policy*, 12 February 2010, available from [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/02/12/this\\_week\\_at\\_war\\_are\\_the\\_ayatollahs\\_using\\_coin](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/02/12/this_week_at_war_are_the_ayatollahs_using_coin); Internet; accessed 20 July 2010.

[66] Cox, “Unrest in Iran,” 2-3; and Haddick, “This Week at War.”

[67] Cox, “Unrest in Iran,” 2; and Haddick, “This Week at War.”

[68] Cox, “Unrest in Iran,” 5-6.

[69] Haddick, “This Week at War.”

[70] One of Termeh’s paintings is titled “I Will Stay Green.” It features a member of the movement and the Green Movement’s commitment to nonviolence as symbolized by a dove. “An Artists View: Iran’s Election Unrest,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 11 June 2010, available from <http://www.rferl.org/soundslide/755.html>; Internet; accessed 20 April 2011.

[71] Karim Sadjadpour, “Can Nonviolence Work in Iran,” Interview with Ramin Jahanbegloo and Robert Toscano, *Foreign Policy*, 18 April 2011, available from [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/18/can\\_nonviolence\\_work\\_in\\_iran?page=0,0](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/18/can_nonviolence_work_in_iran?page=0,0); Internet; accessed 19 April 2011.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Cox, “Unrest in Iran,” 8.

[78] Phares, *The Coming Revolution*, 247-248.

[79] Ibid., 248.

[80] Films, such as *The Cow* (1969), and books, such as Simin Daneshvar’s *Savushun: A Novel About Modern Iran*, clearly depict this mistrust of outsiders.

[81] Cox, “Unrest in Iran,” 2.

## Limitations of the Green Movement and Barriers to Reform in Iran

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[82] Mark Landler and Brian Stelter, "Washington Taps Into a Potent New Force in Diplomacy," *New York Times*, 16 June 2009, available from <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/17/world/middleeast/17media.html>>; Internet; accessed 13 May 2011.

[83] Abadi, "Iran, Facebook, and the Limits of Online Activism."

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Written for: Razi Ahmad Date written: April 2011*

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### About the author:

**Dr. Luke M. Herrington** is an Assistant Professor of Social Science at the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) at Ft. Leavenworth. A political scientist and international relations scholar by training, he received his PhD from the University of Kansas. His research and teaching interests focus on political violence and extremism, religion in comparative and international politics, theories of great power conflict, and the role of various beliefs and attitudes (e.g., tolerance) in political life and development. His most recent work explores the negative impact of conspiracy theory on American national security.

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