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**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**IRANIAN REGIME REFORM:  
OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSEQUENCES**

by

Zachary F. Basford  
William C. McDowell

December 2010

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**IRANIAN REGIME REFORM: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSEQUENCES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Policymakers, military leaders, and political analysts alike have been pondering whether the United States should support regime change in Iran. Iranian regime change supports U.S. national interests in preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, stemming human rights abuses, promoting civil liberties, and encouraging a more Western-friendly regime. The Green Movement has risen as a social movement in Iran that could challenge the regime and force regime reform. However, the Green Movement needs external support to be successful before the current regime develops a nuclear weapons capability. Analysis of the strengths and weakness of the Iranian regime and the Green Movement is used to identify opportunities and consequences of U.S. intervention. Game theory is used to identify the best course of action for U.S. intervention in Iran. The analysis in this thesis determines that U.S. covert support of the Green Movement using elements of soft power, such as psychological operations, computer network operations, and unconventional warfare, is the best means to enhance the Green Movement's ability to affect regime reform.



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNO	Computer Network Operations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GM	Green Movement
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IO	Information Operations
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
MEK	Mujahideen-e Khalq
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PMESII	Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Information
PSYOP	Psychological Operations
SMT	Social Movement Theory
UN	United Nations
UW	Unconventional Warfare
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What would the consequences be were the United States to intervene in some manner to support regime change in Iran? A large number of Iranian citizens are voicing their dissatisfaction with the Iranian regime over issues of human rights abuses, the lack of civil liberties, the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader, and the declining economy of the country. Through protests and demonstrations, an opposition movement is strengthening their campaign against the current regime and demanding major changes in the Iranian government. The United States, in support of its national interests, may choose to assist the opposition to force change in Iran's current regime. The thesis analyzes the strengths and weakness of both the current Iranian regime and the major opposition movement, the Green Movement. The feasibility of successful regime change is then deduced. Next, the thesis examines the possible courses of actions the United States can take to facilitate the Green Movement in affecting regime reform. Ultimately, this thesis provides United States policymakers analysis of the opportunities and consequences resulting from intervention in Iran. This analysis will assist policymakers in determining how the United States should proceed in dealing with Iran.

U.S.. national interests support the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, the stop to human rights abuses, and the abolishment of support for terrorist organizations. The current Iranian regime is guilty of all of these violations. Thus far, U.S.. sanctions against Iran have been ineffectual to affect satisfactory change. The Green Movement in Iran is demanding changes in the Iranian regime that mesh with U.S.. national interests. However, the Green Movement may not be successful in effecting change without outside support.

The methodology in this thesis is to first determine whether the United States should intervene in Iranian affairs. Given that the United States does not want to get involved where success is unlikely, there must first be a determination of whether the Green Movement has a realistic chance of success with or without U.S.. support. The strengths and weaknesses of both the Iranian regime and the Green Movement are analyzed to determine the feasibility of success of the Green Movement. Game theory is



then used to determine the best course of action, should the United States choose to assist the Green Movement in affecting regime reform. This thesis determined that, out of three possible courses of action (no intervention, covert intervention, and overt intervention), U.S.. covert support of the Green Movement using elements of soft power is the best strategy.

Strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian regime are identified using variables within the PMESII model. Each variable is discussed as to how each positively and negatively affects the regime. Each variable is ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = very weak to 5= very strong) to give a numerical scoring of how the regime stands on a relative scale. The variable scores were averaged to get an overall score for each article in the PMESII model. Finally, the score for each article is averaged to give an overall score for the strength of the regime.

Social Movement Theory is used to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Green Movement. The Green Movement's shared grievances are identified, as well as its political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes. The result is a qualitative assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Green Movement and a determination that the Green Movement is a social movement. The Green Movement's standing as a social movement indicates that it is a viable threat to the Iranian regime.

This thesis used game theory as a tool because game theory outcomes very often reflect real-life outcomes. When game theory is applied to the question of whether the United States should intervene in Iranian affairs and how, it was determined that the United States should covertly support the Green Movement. There are several reasons for this outcome. First, U.S.. intervention is necessary in order for the Green Movement to succeed in the near future. Without U.S.. intervention, the Green Movement will either take years to affect regime reform, or the Green Movement may never succeed. Another factor in why game theory determined that U.S.. intervention is preferable is because, if the Green Movement succeeds in regime reform in part because of U.S.. assistance, the United States will likely have more influence in the reform-minded Iranian regime. This influence can help the United States in accomplishing its national security interests.

U.S.. intervention in Iran using instruments of soft power designed to promote reform and weaken the Iranian regime would likely yield results if undertaken in a covert fashion. While diplomatic efforts of engagement and persuasion and economic sanctions might achieve regime reform in time, it would likely occur after Iran developed a nuclear weapons capability. The Green Movement has shown the ability to frame messages that appeal to diverse groups of Iranians, mobilize large groups, and encourage the potential for political opportunities through political elites. Without U.S.. support, the Green Movement is unlikely to grow and organize into a force sufficiently strong enough to make regime reform a reality. The current regime will be able to continue to suppress the Green Movement and eventually relegate it to the level of a nuisance effort. U.S.. covert support to the Green Movement is necessary for it to achieve a tipping point that pushes the current regime towards reform. If U.S.. support is not provided, the next opportunity for Iranian regime reform may not come until after Iran develops a nuclear weapons capability.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The current Iranian regime presents a wide range of problems for United States foreign policy. These issues include human rights violations, support of regional and international terrorism, threats against the United States and its allies, constant disruption and opposition to any Arab-Israeli peace process, a nuclear program that could result in a nuclear weapons capability, and regional instability. With the array of issues and concerns with the current regime in Iran, an assessment needs to be made on whether or not the regime is vulnerable to reform through internal pressure alone or if external actors could help tip the balance toward reform.

A significant number of Iranian citizens are voicing their dissatisfaction with the Iranian regime over issues of human rights abuses, the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader, the declining economy of the country, and the lack of freedoms of speech, assembly, and thought.<sup>1</sup> These dissatisfactions reached a climax after the controversial Iranian elections of June 12, 2009, when President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected under perceived fraudulent means. Major opposition parties, traditional clerical circles, and influential Iranian politicians questioned the legitimacy of his presidency. Many Iranians took to the streets in protest asking “Where is my vote?” and demanded free and honest elections.<sup>2</sup> A large opposition movement, called the Green Movement, was born. The Green Movement increased the number of protests and strengthened their campaign against the current regime, demanding complete regime change or major reforms in the Iranian government. However, the exact path the Green Movement will take is currently unclear.<sup>3</sup> Presently, it is not clear whether the end result will be revolutionary change or reform of the system. However, what is clear is that in order for the Green Movement to be successful it needs to overcome its two biggest challenges:

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Bevilacqua, “Free Iran: The Time is Now,” [revmagdalen.blogspot.com](http://revmagdalen.blogspot.com), December 6, 2009, <http://revmagdalen.blogspot.com/2009/12/free-iran-the-time-is-now.html> (accessed February 20, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Behzad Yaghmaian, “Iran’s Green Movement Spreading Despite Crackdown,” [payvand.com](http://payvand.com), November 15, 2009, <http://payvand.com/news/09/nov/1157.html> (accessed February 19, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Mohammad Tahavori, “Interview with Dr. Banuazizi: About the Green Movement,” [gozaar.org](http://www.gozaar.org), December 29, 2009, <http://www.gozaar.org/template1.php?id=1403&language=english.html> (accessed February 20, 2010).

institutionalizing the movement and clearly and realistically defining its goals.<sup>4</sup> Once the opposition overcomes these first two obstacles, it may still need help in winning over moderates and overcoming the Iranian regime.

The opposition may have the means to succeed. It appears at first look that public sentiment vastly is in favor of radical changes to the government. However, public outcry may not be enough. Questions remain if leadership in the regime will be willing to go against the president and Supreme Leader to support the demands of the opposition movement. Complete regime reform maybe the only way for enough of the opposition's demands to be met. Another question is whether demonstrations are enough to cause reform or regime change. Militant opposition may be necessary to forcefully oust the current regime leaders. Whether the opposition movement follows the path of peaceful demonstrations like the Green Movement, or the more violent path of some of the militant opposition groups, or a combination of the two, success may not be assured without proper framing of the cause and dissemination of information to spur more moderate Iranian citizens and leaders to action. This is where an outside actor, like the United States, could play a crucial role in effecting reform. If outside help is provided, it must not have a direct connection to the United States. A connection to the United States would allow the Iranian regime to portray the opposition movement as an instrument of the United States and play on the mistrust the Iranian people have for U.S.. motives in the Middle East.

#### **A. THE PROBLEM**

Iran is the big gorilla sitting quietly in the middle of the room. It is unprovoked at the moment, but could be potentially very dangerous. The United States has been waging war for nine years in countries adjacent to Iran, and yet the United States is seemingly ignoring the even greater regional threat of Iran itself. Iran could soon acquire a nuclear weapons capability, which would directly pose a threat to the United States and its allies. Moreover, a nuclear weapons capability would quickly make Iran a regional hegemony striking fear in neighboring countries and stirring other Middle Eastern nations in a race

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<sup>4</sup> Tahavori, "Interview with Dr. Banuazizi."

to acquire their own nuclear weapons. In addition, Iran is the most active state sponsor of terrorism and a supporter of anti-American forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>5</sup>

Despite Iran's influence in the region, there exists the potential for reform. The opposition movement in Iran threatens the current Iranian regime and could affect changes that mesh with U.S.. national interests.

Policymakers, military leaders, and political analysts alike have been pondering whether or not the United States should support regime reform in Iran. The problem is that policymakers do not have an analysis that will help them determine how the United States should proceed. There are many questions related to this issue. Is United States involvement necessary to ensure the opposition movement's success? Is the best option to stay out of Iranian affairs in order to protect the opposition movement's credibility? How does Iranian regime reform support U.S.. national interests? What could some detrimental effects of U.S.. involvement be?

## **B. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

The purpose of this thesis is to provide U.S.. policymakers analysis of the opportunities and consequences resulting from intervention in Iran. Options include both involvement and noninvolvement. This analysis will assist policymakers in determining whether the United States should support Iranian regime reform.

It is in U.S.. national interests to assist in Iranian regime reform to: 1) stem the proliferation of nuclear weapons for our own national security and that of our allies, 2) hamper aid to terrorist organizations that can do harm to the United States and or our allies, 3) reduce disruption of the Middle East Peace process, and 4) end human rights violations.<sup>6</sup> The current Iranian regime is guilty of all of these violations, and U.S.. national policy seeks to stem these violations.<sup>7</sup> The United States' position on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which includes nuclear weapons

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<sup>5</sup> "State Sponsors of Terrorism: Iran," www.state.gov, April 30, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122436.htm> (accessed on April 12, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> "Policy Issues," www.state.gov, <http://www.state.gov/policy/> (accessed April 12, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> "Iran," www.state.gov, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm> (accessed April 12, 2010).

capabilities, is made clear in the UN Security Council Resolution 1540. The United States and its United Nations allies will “enforce effective measures against the proliferation of WMD . . . to ensure that no State or non-State actor is a source or beneficiary of WMD proliferation.”<sup>8</sup> According to the U.S.. State Department Country Reports on Terrorism, Iran remains the most active state sponsor of terrorism. Iran’s involvement in the planning and financial support of terrorist attacks throughout the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia had a direct impact on international efforts to promote peace, threatened economic stability in the Gulf, and undermined the growth of democracy. Iran continues to disrupt the Middle East peace through its support for Hamas, Hezbollah, and other Palestinian terrorist groups.<sup>9</sup> As for human rights, the United States government is committed to “hold governments accountable to their obligations under universal human rights norms and international human rights instruments.”<sup>10</sup> Thus far, the United States has been unable to deter Iran, through diplomacy or sanctions, from committing these violations.<sup>11</sup> However, the United States may be able to affect satisfactory change to Iran’s violations of widely accepted international policies. The opposition movement in Iran is demanding reforms in the Iranian regime that mesh with U.S.. national interests. However, the opposition movement may not be successful in effecting reform without external support.

Regime reform falls within U.S.. national interests, but should we intervene? If the opposition movement is successful, it could force change to these policy violations from within, without additional external intervention. Because there is the potential for Iran to remedy these violations internally, U.S.. intervention should only be considered if the opposition movement cannot succeed on its own.

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<sup>8</sup> “UN Security Council Resolution 1540,” www.state.gov, <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/c18943.htm> (accessed on April 12, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> “State Sponsors of Terrorism: Iran,” www.state.gov, April 30, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122436.htm> (accessed on April 12, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> “Human Rights,” www.state.gov, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/index.htm> (accessed on April 12, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> “Iran Sanctions: Options, Opportunities and Consequences,” www.brookings.edu, December 15, 2009, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/testimonies/2009/1215\\_iran\\_sanctions\\_maloney/1215iran\\_sanctions\\_maloney.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/testimonies/2009/1215_iran_sanctions_maloney/1215iran_sanctions_maloney.pdf) (accessed April 12, 2010).

The combination of a weak Iranian regime and a strong opposition movement produces the most likely chance of successful United States intervention. The United States does not want to support a fight in which it may lose, so the first step is to assess the feasibility of successful regime reform by examining the strengths and weaknesses of both the Iranian regime and the opposition movement. If the Iranian regime is determined to be sufficiently strong and the opposition movement is determined to be sufficiently weak, the opposition movement will likely fail. Conversely, if the regime is sufficiently weak and the opposition movement is sufficiently strong, there is a chance of successful regime reform. It is under these conditions that the United States would start to consider involvement to assist the opposition movement.

There are many opportunities for the United States if it chooses involvement to support Iranian regime reform. Under the conditions that the United States supports the opposition movement and the opposition movement successfully affects regime reform, the United States would be in a position to enhance its influence in the region. As an instrumental backer of the opposition movement's rise to power, U.S. interests will likely carry weight when reforms to Iranian laws and policies are considered under the new or reformed Iranian leadership. Several of these U.S. national interests include the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, the stop to human rights abuses, and the abolishment of support for terrorist organizations. U.S. influence with a new Iranian leadership may be successful in achieving our national interests. Josh Shahryar, a journalist and human rights activist, expounds on how a new Iranian government could likely be a useful ally to democratic nations:

If the Green Movement succeeds, it will create a democratic nation which would very likely end up being an ally of other democratic nations against dictatorships in the Middle East . . . Iran could be reasoned with so it would stop funding Hamas and Hezbollah and sending IEDs to Taliban in Afghanistan and al-Qaeda in Iraq. Helping them [Green Movement] is essentially furthering U.S. interests in the region.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Josh Shahryar, "Can the U.S. Help Iran's Green Movement?," huffingtonpost.com, April 3, 2010, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/josh-shahryar/can-the-us-help-irans-gre\\_b\\_524168.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/josh-shahryar/can-the-us-help-irans-gre_b_524168.html) (accessed April 7, 2010).

Consequences of U.S.. involvement are equally important to examine. Overt U.S.. support could weaken opposition movement credibility. The opposition movement could be viewed as an instrument of the U.S.. government. Or, if U.S.. support is provided and the opposition movement fails, U.S.. credibility is weakened in the eyes of the international community. The United States could be viewed as a nation that, yet again, does not have the ability to successfully support or enable fledgling democratic states.

In addition to determining the strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian regime and the opposition movement, as well as identifying opportunities and consequences of U.S.. intervention, there are several other issues that arise. First, what can be done to exploit regime weaknesses? Second, what reactions from the regime can be expected if the United States intervenes in Iranian affairs? Third, if the opposition movement is determined to be a social movement, does this mean that its likelihood of success is high? Fourth, does the opposition movement *need* U.S.. support? Does it *want* U.S.. support? If not, is U.S.. support still in the opposition movement's best interests to enhance its likelihood of success? Finally, what are the steps for an outside actor to effect weakening the Iranian regime and strengthening the opposition movement?

### **C. METHODOLOGY**

There are three questions that United States policymakers must answer when it comes to international conflicts of crisis. The first is: Do the issues within the conflict fall within U.S.. national interests? The second is: Can the conflict be resolved without U.S.. intervention? The third is: Should the United States intervene? The first question can be answered by examining U.S.. national interests that are related to the conflict. The second question can be answered by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the current Iranian regime and the opposition movement. The third question can be answered by determining the opportunities and consequences of U.S.. intervention.

The methodology utilized in this thesis is to first determine if the United States should intervene in Iranian affairs. Given that the United States does not want to get involved in something where success is unlikely, there must first be a determination of



whether the opposition movement has a realistic chance of success with or without U.S.. support. The strengths and weaknesses of both the Iranian regime and the opposition movement are analyzed to determine the feasibility of success of the opposition movement. Next, we analyze the opportunities and consequences of several possible forms of U.S.. involvement. This analysis highlights which form of intervention (or non-intervention) is the most appealing. Finally, game theory is used to determine the best course of action the United States and the opposition movement should take. A discussion of the results is intended to help policymakers make an informed decision on how to proceed in dealing with Iran.

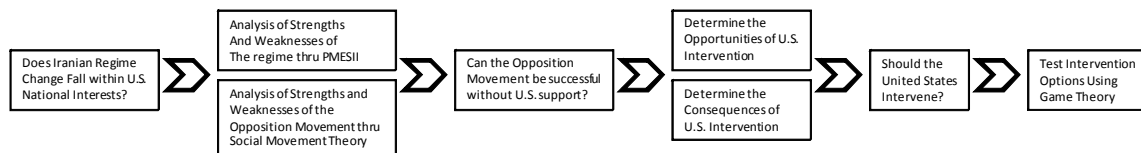


Figure 1. Methodology Flow Diagram

### 1. Assessing Current Strengths

The strengths and weaknesses of both the Iranian regime and the opposition movement need to be analyzed to determine the feasibility of success of the opposition movement. An initial assessment will indicate if the opposition movement even has a chance of success. It is our contention that the opposition movement has a chance at affecting successful regime reform only if the Iranian regime is sufficiently weak and the opposition movement is sufficient strong. In all other cases, the opposition movement will likely fail if not assisted by an external actor.

		Regime Strength	
		Strong	Weak
Opposition Movement Strength	Strong	Mid	Better
	Weak	Worse	Mid

Figure 2. Conditions Indicating the Chance of Iranian Regime Reform

However, the degree to which the regime is strong and the opposition movement is weak is also a factor. If the opposition movement is only marginally too weak to affect regime reform, the United States could affect some of the opposition movement's weaknesses to make them stronger, thus giving them a better chance of success.

		Regime Strength	
		Strong	Weak
Opposition Movement Strength	Strong	Mid	Better
	Weak	Worse	Mid

Figure 3. Example of the Degree of Strength of the Iranian Regime and the Opposition Movement without U.S. Assistance

		Regime Strength	
		Strong	Weak
Opposition Movement Strength	Strong	Mid	Better
	Weak	Worse	Mid

Figure 4. Example of the Degree of Strength of the Iranian Regime and the Opposition Movement with U.S. Assistance

## 2. Assessing the Regime

Quantifying Iranian regime strength can be accomplished by analyzing different aspects of the government and assigning each aspect a relative value. The PMESII (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, and Information) model can be used to analyze the Iranian regime. A full picture of the overall strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian regime can be assessed by analyzing the Iranian regime through each article of PMESII.

Each article (Political, Military, Economic, etc.) of the PMESII model can have multiple variables that can be used to assess the article's strength. Each variable can be ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = very weak to 5= very strong) to give a numerical scoring of how the regime stands on a relative scale. The variable scores will be averaged to get

an overall score for each article in the PMESII model. Finally, the score for each article will be averaged to give an overall score for the strength of the regime.

From an analysis of the Iranian regime, the overall strength of the regime can be determined. The major strengths and the major weaknesses can also be identified. These results can help determine if the Iranian regime is weak enough for the opposition movement to affect reform. The results can also indicate whether or not the Green Movement will need to join forces with one or more of the armed political groups that also oppose the current Iranian regime, or if the opposition movement will need assistance from an outside actor, like the United States, in order for Iranian regime reform to be feasible.

### **3. Assessing the Opposition Movement**

The strengths and weaknesses of the opposition movement can be assessed by using social movement theory. Social movement theory looks at groups of people with shared grievances. Through collective action, these groups become powerful forces in affecting changes in their society. However, large numbers of people with shared grievances is often not enough to affect reform. Groups with shared grievances need political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes to be successful in affecting significant change.<sup>13</sup>

There is a higher chance of success if the opposition movement in Iran has all the characteristics to qualify it as a social movement. Having all the characteristics of a social movement would indicate that the opposition movement has processes in place to be a viable threat to the Iranian regime. As a viable threat, the Iranian regime will be compelled to do something by attempting to crush the movement, giving in to the movement's demands, or reaching some form of compromise. If the opposition movement cannot be deemed a social movement with all of the necessary characteristics,

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<sup>13</sup> Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, "Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes—toward synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, 1-20 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.

it has little feasibility of success and will likely be seen as an easier adversary that the regime can crush.

The methodology in using social movement theory will allow for the determination of whether the opposition movement in Iran will have a chance of success as a collective action, and, in the end, if it can succeed in affecting regime reform. This analysis will also allow for a determination whether outside support is necessary in order for the opposition to succeed.

The third step in our methodology is to analyze the opportunities and consequences of intervention. Opportunities and consequences apply both to the United States and to the opposition movement. Potential opportunities that arise from Iranian regime reform include the abolishment of support for terrorist organizations, reduced disruption in the Middle East peace process, cooperation towards non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, improved human rights, and increased civil liberties for the Iranian people. Potential consequences of intervention include the loss of credibility of the opposition movement, increased human rights violations, increased disruption of the Middle East peace process, and interference of oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz.

#### **4. Using Game Theory to Test Predictions**

The final step in our methodology is to use game theory to test predictions about the outcomes of possible intervention. Game theory is a mathematical tool that captures behaviors in strategic situations and can be used to reasonably predict the outcome of a conflict. Although there are many factors—including unpredictable ones—that determine how a conflict plays out, game theory also allows players to find strategies or alliances that allow them to negotiate a settlement that is sufficiently satisfactory to all.

One benefit of game theory is it can determine the most likely outcome and the best compromise solution between multiple players. The game that will be played here has three players: the Iranian regime, the opposition movement, and the United States. In a three player game there can be coalitions between players which will affect the outcome. If the opposition movement forms a coalition with the United States, it may have a better chance of ending up with more satisfying outcome. In addition to

identifying which, and how, the options should be played, game theory will give a predictable assessment of whether or not the United States will need to support the opposition movement for it to be successful in affecting Iranian regime reform.

#### **D. CHAPTER REVIEW**

The beginning of Chapter I describes the current political situation in Iran. Next, the problem section identifies that policymakers do not have an analysis that will help them determine if United States should support regime reform in Iran. Then, the purpose and scope section identifies U.S.. national interests in Iranian regime reform, and poses the question of whether or not the United States should intervene in Iranian affairs. Finally, Chapter I outlines the methodology used to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian regime and the opposition movement, identifies the opportunities and consequences of involvement, and tests predicted outcomes using game theory. The intent of this research is to assist policymakers in understanding the opportunities and consequences of U.S.. involvement in Iranian regime reform.

Chapter II examines the Iranian regime. The variables of PMESII are evaluated in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian regime. These variables will be defined and used to provide a quantitative analysis of the regime as described in the methodology section of Chapter I. The areas of PMESII that are assessed as weak are further analyzed and potential methods of exploitation are proposed.

Chapter III examines the opposition movement. The strengths and weaknesses of the opposition movement are analyzed using social movement theory. An analysis of the shared grievances and the three elements of social movement theory are conducted as described in the methodology section of Chapter I. The conclusion of this analysis provides a qualitative assessment of the opposition movement to determine if it qualifies as a viable social movement and if the opposition movement is strong enough to effect regime reform.

Chapter IV examines the question of whether or not Iranian regime reform falls within United States interests. Next, the opportunities and consequences of United States intervention in Iran are assessed in three areas. First, the opportunities and consequences

of non-intervention are examined. Second, the opportunities and consequences of covert United States intervention in Iran are examined. Third, the opportunities and consequences of overt United States intervention in Iran are examined.

Chapter V uses game theory to show the likely outcomes of U.S. intervention options using the analysis conducted in Chapters II and III, and the courses of action and opportunities and consequences described in Chapter IV.

In Chapter VI, the thesis conclusion summarizes the results of the analysis in Chapters II, III, and IV, the results of the game theory in Chapter V, and policy implications related to this analysis. Areas for future analysis will also be addressed.

## II. ANALYZING THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE IRANIAN REGIME USING PMESII

Despite public outcry over the Iranian regime's economic mismanagement and indications of schisms in the regime's political leaders, political observers say that the regime is still very strong and is not likely to collapse.<sup>14</sup> The government is bolstered by a strong military and security apparatus that has a vested political and economic interest in the current regime. The regime is willing to use force to quell public protests, and is not above arresting and torturing activists, demonstrators, and journalists who speak out against the regime.<sup>15</sup> The regime has several mechanisms to carry out its rule of law to include the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), regular military forces, the Basij, intelligence services, and domestic police forces. The IRGC, with an estimated strength of 125,000, is indispensable to the survival of the regime by acting as a counterbalance to the Iranian Regular Army.<sup>16</sup> The Basij, which falls under the control of the IRGC, is a type of voluntary national police force with an estimated strength of 300,000 and the ability to mobilize one million registered voters.<sup>17</sup> The Basij is tasked in policing demonstrations and ensuring behavioral codes and Islamic morality.<sup>18</sup> Because of the regime's strength in its security apparatuses, any opposition movement will face a strong challenge from the regime if they hope to succeed.

In order to assess whether an opposition movement has the chance to succeed, an analysis of the regime must be done. The strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian regime need to be analyzed to determine the feasibility of success of the opposition movement. An initial assessment will indicate if the opposition movement even has a chance of

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<sup>14</sup> David E. Thaler et al., *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Martin Milinski, "The Islamic Republic of Iran," *yaQoot.com*, December 10, 2009, <http://www.yaqoot.com/Iran.html> (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Milinski, "The Islamic Republic of Iran."

<sup>17</sup> "Janes," *Janes.com*, December 7, 2009, [http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2008/jir10416.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=basij&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=JIR&](http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2008/jir10416.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=basij&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=JIR&) (accessed March 8, 2010)

<sup>18</sup> Milinski, "The Islamic Republic of Iran."

success. Assessment for the strength of the Iranian regime will be done through evaluating six articles: political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, and information (PMESII). Each of these articles will be assessed to determine if the regime is strong enough to resist the opposition movement. Furthermore, there may be areas that can be exploited by the international community or the opposition movement to weaken the regime so that it may be more susceptible to reform. Each article of the PMESII model can have multiple variables that can be used to assess the article's strength. Each variable can be ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = very weak to 5 = very strong) to give a numerical scoring of how the regime stands on a relative scale. The variable scores will be averaged to get an overall score for each article in the PMESII model. Finally, the score for each article will be averaged to give an overall score for the strength of the regime.

Under the political article of PMESII, the four variables that will be used to assess political strength are legitimacy of the state, widespread violation of human rights, civil liberties, and when the military acts as an independent economic and political entity.

The legitimacy of the state is when the state has the ability to command public loyalty, create positive public perceptions of the election process, and the ability to generate domestic support for government legislation and policies.<sup>19</sup> Widespread violation of human rights is the emergence of authoritarian, dictatorial or military rule, the rise in political prisoners and political violence, and the widespread abuse of legal, political and social rights. Civil liberties are rights and freedoms that protect an individual from the state, such as rights freedom of religion, freedom of speech, the right to due process, and to privacy.<sup>20</sup> When the military acts as an independent economic and political entity, there can be the emergence of elite guards, emergence of state-sponsored

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<sup>19</sup> "Failed and Fragile States," *Country Indicators for Foreign Policy.org*, [http://www.carleton.ca/cifp/app/ffs\\_data\\_methodology.php](http://www.carleton.ca/cifp/app/ffs_data_methodology.php) (accessed August 3, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> "Civil Liberties," *Wikipedia.org*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilliberties> (accessed August 3, 2010).



or state-supported private militias that terrorize those seen to be sympathetic to the opposition, and the emergence of an “army within an army” that serves the interests of the dominant military or political clique.<sup>21</sup>

Under the military article of PMESII, two variables that will be used to assess military strength are the number of security forces able to suppress opposition and the public’s view toward the security forces. It also identifies the government’s ability to quell uprisings. If the number of security forces is high enough and the regime is willing to use them against its own people, the opposition movement could be crushed quickly, especially if the opposition movement turns violent and the regime has a legitimate excuse to counter with violence. Finally, the public’s perception of the security forces could also indicate the regime’s ability to quell an uprising. If the public respects the authority of the security forces, the public is more likely to obey the security force’s orders to disband.

Under the economic article of PMESII, the two variables that will be used to evaluate economic strength are the uneven economic development along group lines and severe economic decline.<sup>22</sup> Uneven economic development along group lines includes group-based inequality, or perceived inequality, in education, jobs, economic status, poverty levels, and education levels. Severe economic decline includes a pattern of progressive economic decline of the society as measured by per capita income, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), debt, poverty levels, and other economic measures.<sup>23</sup>

Under the social article of PMESII, the two variables that will be used to evaluate social strength are education rates and the United Nations Human Development Indices. Education rates reflect the percentage of the country that has obtained a primary and secondary level education. Human development indices combine United Nations data on life expectancy, adult literacy rate (age 15 and above), combined gross enrollment rate in

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<sup>21</sup> “Iran,” *fundforpeace.org*, 2008, [http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=397&Itemid=556](http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=397&Itemid=556) (accessed March 4, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> “Iran,” *fundforpeace.org*, 2008, [http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=397&Itemid=556](http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=397&Itemid=556) (accessed March 4, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> “Iran,” *fundforpeace.org*, 2008, [http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=397&Itemid=556](http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=397&Itemid=556) (accessed March 4, 2010).

schools, and GDP per capita into a single score in order to measure the progress of human development in the country.<sup>24</sup>

Under the infrastructure article of PMESII, the three variables that will be used to assess the strength of the infrastructure are telecommunications capability, the availability of road, rail and airport systems, and the regime's ability to provide the people with food, water, and sewer.

Under the information article of PMESII, the two variables that will be used to assess the strength of information are the changes in freedom of press and the government's control over access to media sources (Internet, mobile phone, and satellite TV). Evaluating changes in these indicators can indicate how much uncensored information can be accessed by the population. The more informed people are, the more likely they will pick sides in support of, or against, the Iranian regime.

## **A. POLITICAL**

The Islamic government lead by Grand Ayatollah Khamenei is still perceived as a legitimate authority by a majority of the Iranian people. While the opposition movement does present some challenge to the current regime, it appears that the regime is still politically strong. The regime appears to have solid public support and has thus far been able to limit the size and effectiveness of the opposition movement. Prior to the 2009 presidential elections, a 2006 World Public Opinion poll showed that Iranians gave a 6.9 on a scale of 0–10 when asked if they felt that the country was governed by representatives elected by the people.<sup>25</sup> After the June 2009 elections, stronger doubts arose about the legitimacy of the electoral process and the government as a whole. A series of polls were consolidated and analyzed by WorldPublicOpinion.org in the months after the election. The results, published in February 2010, demonstrated that a large majority of the Iranian public viewed the election process as fair and that Mahmoud

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<sup>24</sup> "Human Development Report 2009—Iran," *UnitedNations.org*, [http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_IRN.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_IRN.html) (accessed August 4, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> "Iranians: Do They Say They Want a Revolution?," *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, July 19, 2007, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafricara/379.php?lb=brme&pnt=379&nid=&id=> (accessed May 17, 2010).

Ahmadinejad was legitimately elected.<sup>26</sup> When the Iranian people were asked about their satisfaction with the electoral process, 81 percent of Iranians stated they were either satisfied or very satisfied.<sup>27</sup> When asked about the legitimacy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, over 70 percent of Iranians viewed it as legitimate.<sup>28</sup> When it came to the power of the Supreme Leader, 61 percent of Iranians agreed that he had the necessary amount of power.<sup>29</sup> The Iranian people gave positive marks—5.9 on a scale of 0–10—when asked if the country was governed according to the will of the people.<sup>30</sup> Over all, polling shows that 85 percent of the Iranian people are satisfied with the current government system in Iran.<sup>31</sup> These polling numbers indicate that the regime still has a strong base of support among the Iranian people and has not suffered any significant loss of legitimacy.

When it comes to human rights, Khamenei lays a strong Islamic foundation in his guidance: "Islam safeguards human rights and human dignity, guarantees morality and virtue, and promotes peace and security. The most unacceptable and unfair allegation has been leveled against Islam by those who accuse Islam of being opposed to human rights, civilization, and security. And they use this accusation against Muslim nations in order to justify their oppressive thirst for power."<sup>32</sup> Khamenei called human rights "a fundamental principle underlying Islamic teachings, which precedes Western concerns for human rights by many centuries."<sup>33</sup> There is strong support among the Iranian people when it comes to their views of the Iranian regime's respect for human rights. When

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<sup>26</sup> "An Analysis of Multiple Polls of the Iranian Public," *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, February 3, 2010, [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/feb10/IranElection\\_Feb10\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/feb10/IranElection_Feb10_rpt.pdf) (accessed May 16, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> "An Analysis of Multiple Polls of the Iranian Public," 13.

<sup>28</sup> "An Analysis of Multiple Polls of the Iranian Public," 16.

<sup>29</sup> "An Analysis of Multiple Polls of the Iranian Public," 16.

<sup>30</sup> "An Analysis of Multiple Polls of the Iranian Public," 19.

<sup>31</sup> "Iranians: Do They Say They Want a Revolution?," *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, July 19, 2007, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafricara/379.php?lb=brme&pnt=379&nid=&id=> (accessed May 17, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> "The Supreme Leaders Generation of Wealth," *The Center for Publishing and Preserving the Works of the Grand Ayatollah Khamenei*, [http://english.khamenei.ir/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1230&Itemid=13](http://english.khamenei.ir/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1230&Itemid=13) (accessed May 20, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> "Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei," *LabbickOnline.ir*, <http://www.labbaik.ir/en/uploads/book/Supreme%20Leader%20of%20World.pdf> (accessed March 18, 2010).

polled, 70 percent of Iranians agreed that the regime had respect for human rights.<sup>34</sup> However, on the Failed State Index, Iran received a 9.4 on a 1-10 scale, with 10 being the worst possible score.<sup>35</sup> While the international community may view Iran's human rights record as very poor, from a perspective of trying to find exploitable weaknesses in Iran, it is the Iranian people's perception that matters most.

The IRGC's expansion into the economic and political realms of Iran presents the appearance of a state within a state. The IRGC plays a dominant role in the telecommunications, construction, and oil industries. The IRGC has successfully denied foreign competition in the telecommunications infrastructure that would have competed with companies the IRGC owns. The IRGC owned conglomerate Gharargah Sazandegiye Khatam al-Anbia has become so large that it routinely underbids private companies for construction, civil engineering projects, oil and gas infrastructure development projects, and has taken over public enterprises to expand its influence.<sup>36</sup> The IRGC uses its ability to site national security issues, government protections, access to financing from Iranian banks and its own enterprises to outbid competition and avoid accountability.<sup>37</sup>

The IRGC has strengthened its role in the political direction of the regime. Many Iranian political figures have IRGC roots. President Ahmadinejad is a former IRGC commander, and former IRGC officers have become governors of several provinces. One IRGC commander said that the Guards' intervention in politics has been "successful" since those who left school to fight at the Iraq-Iran war front can now enter "a new

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<sup>34</sup> "Iranians: Do They Say They Want a Revolution?," *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, July 19, 2007, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafricara/379.php?lb=brme&pnt=379&nid=&id=> (accessed May 17, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> "Failed State Index," *ForeignPolicy.com*, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/21/2010\\_failed\\_states\\_index\\_interactive\\_mapandranks](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/21/2010_failed_states_index_interactive_mapandranks) (accessed August 4, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Ali Alfoneh, "How Intertwined are the Revolutionary Guards in Iran's Economy?," *IranTracker.org*, October 22, 2007, <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/how-intertwined-are-revolutionary-guards-irans-economy> (accessed March 5, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Alfoneh, "How Intertwined are the Revolutionary Guards in Iran's Economy?"

scene” to preserve the “Islamic nature of the regime.”<sup>38</sup> IRGC favoritism has resulted from the progression of former IRGC officers into the political system and has allowed the IRGC to become a very powerful force both militarily and politically. The IRGC’s strength and influence are demonstrated in its already large and growing role in the economy and its success in cracking down on the opposition movement’s protests. The IRGC’s strength and political influence makes it a major factor in the direction of the regime. To hold on to its power, the IRGC will do what it deems necessary to protect its existing and growing influence. The IRGC takes its mandate to protect the revolution from internal and external threats very seriously. The IRGC is a strong pillar for the regime because of its vested economic and political interests in seeing the current regime remain in place. The IRGC is, and will remain, loyal to the regime because it has a vested interest in preserving the status quo of a strong regime. A strong regime will ensure a strong and influential IRGC, and vice versa.

In summarizing the political variables of the regime, while the post-election protests-received widespread attention in the international media, they appear to not have significantly altered the public opinion of most Iranians. The size of the subsequent protests in November and December 2009 and February 2010 were smaller than the protests immediately following the elections. This indicates that there was either a decline in overt support for the opposition movement, a more effective regime response to controlling the movement and its leadership, or a combination of both. While the opposition movement does present some challenge to the current regime, it appears that the regime is still politically strong.

## **B. MILITARY**

Iranian forces maintain sufficient capabilities and numbers to deter and suppress internal threats and a coup d’état. During the 2009 elections, the regime demonstrated its

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<sup>38</sup> Ali Alfoneh, “The Revolutionary Guards Role in Iranian Politics,” *IranTracker.org*, September 1, 2008, <http://www.irantracker.org/military-activities/revolutionary-guards-role-iranian-politics> (accessed March 5, 2010).

willingness to deploy sufficient assets to quell public demonstrations with force and the ability to prevent large follow-on demonstrations later in the year and early 2010.

The Iranian military is comprised of three components: the Islamic Republic of Iran Regular Forces, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the Basij. The regular forces are estimated at 350,000 strong and are primarily focused on the security of the Iranian borders.<sup>39</sup> The IRGC and the Basij are responsible for protecting the regime, which makes them a primary instrument for the Supreme Leader to control the internal workings of the country and protect the regime from internal threats. The IRGC and the Basij have a central role in the stability of the regime, and their power in the economic and political arenas continue to grow. The IRGC has an estimated strength of 125,000 and the Basij has an estimated strength of 300,000 with an ability to mobilize 1 million registered members.<sup>40</sup> While the IRGC and the Iranian Regular Forces provide Iran with a sizeable conventional military deterrent against regional opponents or any Gulf Cooperation Council alliance, it would not be able to stand up to United States conventional forces on the ground, in the air, or in the Persian Gulf due to antiquated armor, aircraft, and naval assets that could not stand up to the United States advanced military technology.

The IRGC is also an important element in supporting the Islamist nature of the government. The IRGC was created under a decree from Ayatollah Khomeini for the sacred defense of the Islamic Republic and as an ideological guard assisting in the implementation of the Islamic Revolution.<sup>41</sup> The IRGC uses outreach programs to maintain strong support of the Islamic government in the rural areas of Iran. Some of the outreach programs are programs that build and run public works projects, provide job training, scholarships, and run summer camps for children—to indoctrinate Islamic

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<sup>39</sup> “Janes,” *Janes.com*, December 7, 2009, [http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2008/jir10416.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=basij&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=JIR&](http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2008/jir10416.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=basij&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=JIR&) (accessed March 8,2010)

<sup>40</sup> “Janes,” *Janes.com*, December 7, 2009, [http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2008/jir10416.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=basij&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=JIR&](http://search.janes.com/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2008/jir10416.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=basij&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=JIR&) (accessed March 8,2010)

<sup>41</sup> Frederic Wehrey, et al, *The Rise of the Pasdaran* (Santa Monica, Ca: RAND Corporation, 2009), 21.

principles at an early age.<sup>42</sup> The Islamic government accomplishes its indoctrination through constant presence, demonstrations of support, and development projects in the rural areas. In a public opinion poll, 83 percent of Iranians had a lot or some confidence in the security forces.<sup>43</sup>

### C. ECONOMY

Despite the political and military strength of the Iranian regime, the economy is a source of weakness and possible vulnerability. The state-run economy has been on the decline since 2000. Iran's economy ranks 87<sup>th</sup> in the world and 6<sup>th</sup> in the region when measured by GDP.<sup>44</sup> This position has remained stable over the last three years. Some significant problems include slow growth in GDP, increasing inflation, and high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Though the GDP has continued to rise, its rate of growth has dropped from 6 percent to 2 percent in the last three years.<sup>45</sup> Eighty percent of the Iranian economy is based on earnings from oil and gas exports.<sup>46</sup> Inflation in Iran has been in double digits for most of the last ten years. Inflation in Iran was at 25 percent in 2008 and exceeded 30 percent in 2009<sup>47</sup>. This rate of inflation has been five to ten times higher than other OPEC countries in the region.<sup>48</sup> Reasons for the rise in inflation include the government denying banks the ability to charge interest on loans, raiding surpluses from oil revenues, gasoline shortages, rapidly rising real estate costs, and

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<sup>42</sup> Wehrey, *The Rise of the Pasdaran*, 35.

<sup>43</sup> "An Analysis of Multiple Polls of the Iranian Public," *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, February 3, 2010, [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/feb10/IranElection\\_Feb10\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/feb10/IranElection_Feb10_rpt.pdf) (accessed May 16, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> "The World Fact Book: Iran," *CIA.gov*, January 26, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos/ir.html> (accessed February 15, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> "The World Fact Book: Iran," *CIA.gov*, January 26, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos/ir.html> (accessed February 15, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> "Iran Country Profile," *loc.gov*, May 2008, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iran.pdf> (accessed March 2, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> "Inflation, GDP Deflator (Annual%)," *United Nations.org*, [http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=iran&d=WDI-indicator\\_code%3aNY.GDP.DEFL.KD.ZG%3bcountry\\_code%3aIRN](http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=iran&d=WDI-indicator_code%3aNY.GDP.DEFL.KD.ZG%3bcountry_code%3aIRN) (accessed March 8, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> "World Bank Iran," *WorldBank.org*, [http://ddp-xt.worldbank.org/ext/ddpreports/ViewSharedReport?&CF=1&REPORT\\_ID=9147&REQUEST\\_TYPE=VIEWADVANCED&HF=N&WSP=N](http://ddp-xt.worldbank.org/ext/ddpreports/ViewSharedReport?&CF=1&REPORT_ID=9147&REQUEST_TYPE=VIEWADVANCED&HF=N&WSP=N) (accessed March 5, 2010).

implementation of price controls.<sup>49</sup> Iran continues to suffer from double-digit unemployment and underemployment. Underemployment among Iran's educated youth is over 20 percent. Underemployment has convinced many educated Iranians to seek jobs overseas, resulting in a significant loss of intellectual capital<sup>50</sup>

The continued state control of the economy, rising inflation, and massive unemployment and underemployment among educated youth are sources of weakness in the regime that, over time, could result in greater support to the opposition movement. The growing dominance of the IRGC in the economy and the failed efforts of the regime to solve inflation and unemployment problems are a source of frustration that the opposition movement can utilize to frame its grievances and mobilize supporters.

#### **D. SOCIAL**

Iran has a very high literacy rate of 79.4 percent and nearly 1.6 million students enrolled in university-level institutions.<sup>51</sup> The completion of secondary education ranks above Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen and is on par with Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Oman.<sup>52</sup> However, the university educational system has not been able to keep up, turning away 80 percent of those who take the university entrance exams.<sup>53</sup> With a growing urban population, a high through-put of students enrolled in university level education, and high unemployment and underemployment, this presents a growing area of social instability consisting of frustrated and well-educated people. Iran's population is about 72 million, with two thirds of the population located in urban areas and

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Rubin, "Irans Economy Runs out of Steam," *IranTracker.org*, October 2008, <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/irans-economy-runs-out-steam> (accessed March 5, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> "The World Fact Book: Iran," *CIA.gov*, January 26, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos/ir.html> (accessed February 15, 2010).

<sup>51</sup> "TheFundForPeace," *FundForPeace.org*, 2008, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=comcontent&task=view&id=397&Itemid=556> (accessed March 4, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> "Iran-Islamic-Republic," *World Bank.org*, 2010, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/iran-islamic-republic> (accessed July 28, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> Tara Nesvanderani, "Iran's Youth: The Protests are Not Over," *The United States Institute of Peace PeaceBrief* 36 (June 8, 2010): 3.



continuing to grow at a rate of 2.1 percent.<sup>54</sup> As well, 18 percent of the Iranian population lives below the poverty level.<sup>55</sup> Iran received a Human Development Index rating 0.782 on a scale of 0-1. This rating stands as 88<sup>th</sup> in the world out of 182 rated countries; however, Iran is well above the average for all the Middle Eastern states.<sup>56</sup>

## **E. INFRASTRUCTURE**

Iran has a strong transportation, food distribution, domestic services and a rapidly growing telecommunications infrastructure. The only major weakness is their ability to produce gasoline domestically, but foreign investment and current infrastructure projects are in progress in order to close this gap. In the last ten years the telecommunications system infrastructure projects have greatly increased mobile phone and Internet access. Between 2001 and 2008, the amount of available telephone lines nearly doubled to 24 million, and cellular telephone service has tripled to over 30 million subscribers.<sup>57</sup> Internet access has risen from 1 million in 2001 to 21 million in 2007.<sup>58</sup> Nearly one third of Iranians have Internet access, mobile phones, or both. The Iranian's access to mobile phone services and Internet ranks in the top 30 nations in the world.<sup>59</sup>

The *CIA World Fact Book* has the Iranian road, rail, and airport infrastructure ranked in the top 30 nations in the world, and gives high ratings to its waterways and merchant marine capabilities.<sup>60</sup> According to the world food program, Iran has a low Global Hunger Index rating, thus indicating that the population has good access to food

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<sup>54</sup> "Iran Country Profile," *loc.gov*, May 2008, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iran.pdf>. (accessed March 2, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> "The World Fact Book: Iran," *CIA.gov*, January 26, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos/ir.html> (accessed February 15, 2010).

<sup>56</sup> "Iran Country Fact Sheet," *UnitedNationsHumanDevelopment.org*, [http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_IRN.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_IRN.html) (accessed August 3, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> "The World Fact Book: Iran," *CIA.gov*, January 26, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos/ir.html> (accessed February 15, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> "Internet Users," *UnitedNations.org*, <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=Iran&d=MDG&f=seriesRowID%3a608%3bcountryID%3a364> (accessed March 8, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> "The World Fact Book: Iran," *CIA.gov*, January 26, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos/ir.html> (accessed February 15, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> "The World Fact Book: Iran," *CIA.gov*, January 26, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos/ir.html> (accessed February 15, 2010).

supplies and clean water. Issues of hunger and malnutrition are also very low.<sup>61</sup> Ninety-four percent of Iranians have reliable access to clean water, which is higher than the Middle East average of 87.7 percent.<sup>62</sup>

## F. INFORMATION

The regime's censorship of external information sources and social networking sites indicates that the regime is concerned that these platforms will lead to greater dissent against the regime. The regime wants to restrict the exposure of its people to Western social and political influences. The regime fears that exposure to Western influences could lead to social corruption and increased moral and political challenges to the regime's legitimacy.

The Iranian regime has established an extensive media apparatus (print, TV, radio, and Internet) that allows it to spread its vision of the Islamic Republic. However, Iran limits freedom of press in its media apparatuses. Freedom of the press in Iran has continued to decline between 2002 and 2009 and Iran has never been given a rating of less than "Not Free."<sup>63</sup> Following the June 2009 elections, Iranians were able to send out some pictures and video of the regime's violent crackdown against the protesters. However, the regime quickly took measures to control media access. Not long after the initial protests, in order to monitor e-mail traffic, the regime announced the creation of a national e-mail service. They limited the ability of journalists to see the later protests and they did a much more effective-job at denying cell phone and Internet service during the protests.<sup>64</sup> The disruptions of services during and after the protests, according to the Communications Ministry, were due to damaged fiber optic lines and planned software

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<sup>61</sup> "World Food Program," *WFP.org*, 2009, <http://www.wfp.org/countries/Iran> (accessed 20 March, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> "Improved Water Source," *UnitedNations.org*, <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=WDI&f=IndicatorCode%3aSH.H2O.SAFE.ZS> (accessed August 3, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> "Freedom of the Press," *FreedomHouse.org*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2002> (accessed 29 July, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> "American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research," *AEI.org*, February 12, 2010, <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/regime%E2%80%99s-preemption-assessing-february-11-protests-iran> (accessed March 2, 2010).

updates to the cellular phone network.<sup>65</sup> Despite these disruptions and Iran's pervasive filtering and surveillance of Internet and mobile phone services, information still got out to a regional and international audience. Access to Internet and cell phone services is expanding, and Iranians that support the opposition movement are becoming more innovative in getting around state controls to media access. It will be increasingly difficult for the regime to control access to media and to control information flow between opposition movement supporters. However, the regime is determined to limit opposition movement communication and organization by controlling and censoring information mediums such as the Internet and mobile phone usage.

#### **G. RANKING THE REGIME USING PMESII**

Figure 5 summarizes the findings of each of the PMESII articles and their variables. Our rating of each variable reflects our attempt to quantify the strengths and weaknesses of the regime. The rating reflects a weighing of the facts that were related to each variable. The variable ratings in Table 1 are subjective.

Overall the regime received a score of 3.18 on a scale of 1 to 5. This indicates that the regime remains strong and stable, but not so strong that important aspects of the regime are not invulnerable to exploitation.

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<sup>65</sup> "American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research," *AEI.org*, February 12, 2010, <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/regime%E2%80%99s-preemption-assessing-february-11-protests-iran> (accessed March 2, 2010).

Scoring of the Islamic Republic of Iran Using PMESII											
	Variable Ranking (0-5)					Article Ranking (0-5)					
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	Notes:
<b>POLITICAL</b>											
Legitimacy of the State					X						Regime retains legitimacy with 85% of citizens Regime rates 9.4 out of 10 for being HR violators Widespread repression of most civil liberties IRGC dominant influence on politics and economics
Widespread Violation of Human Rights		X									
Civil Liberties	X										
When Security Apparatuses Operate as a "State Within a State"					X						
<b>MILITARY</b>											
Number of Security Forces Able to Suppress Opposition					X	(4.50)				X	Large number of security forces available to protect regime 83% of Iranians have confidence in security forces
Public's View toward the Security Forces					X						
<b>ECONOMIC</b>											
Uneven Economic Development		X									Lack of private competition in economy (IRGC influence) High inflation, unemployment, & declining GDP
Severe Economic Decline		X									
<b>SOCIAL</b>											
Education Rates					X	(3.50)				X	79.4% literacy rate and high university enrollment, but has not met demand for all those who wish to enroll Ranks 88th of 182 countries
UN Human Development Index				X							
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b>											
Telecommunications					X						Top 1/3 of world Top 1/3 of world 94% reliable access to clean water
Transportation					X	(4.33)				X	
Food, Water, & Sewer					X						
<b>INFORMATION</b>											
Freedom of Press	X										Freedom of press and speech is tightly controlled High access, but pervasive monitoring and censorship
Electronic Media Access			X								
<b>Overall PMESII Score:</b>						<b>3.18</b>					

Figure 5. Methodology Flow Diagram

The sources of weaknesses for the regime are in its mismanagement of the economy, its censorship of communications, repression of civil liberties, and its standing in committing human rights violations. These are facets of the regime that could be exploited to weaken the overall strength of the regime. If exploited properly, growing tensions over these issues could cause growing fissures in the regime. Large fissures could cause the regime to weaken to the point that it would succumb to pressures for reform.

### **III. ANALYZING THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE OPPOSITION MOVEMENT USING SMT**

This chapter looks at the strengths and weaknesses of the major opposition movement in Iran, the Green Movement, and analyzes the movement using Social Movement Theory (SMT). Based on the application of the SMT model laid out by Doug McAdam to the Green Movement, it was determined that the Green Movement contains enough attributes to be considered a social movement. With this identification, the Green Movement can be viewed as a significant threat to the Iranian regime.

There are many organizations that oppose the current Iranian government. Some are militant and violent while others are not. Armed political groups, such as the Mujahadeen-e Khalq (MEK), do not pose a significant threat to the regime itself. They have not shown the ability to organize or develop into a threat capable of forcing Iranian political elites to submit to the armed group's demands, or even recognize their grievances. Although armed political groups may be useful to those who support Iranian regime reform by providing additional external pressure on Iranian political figures and providing information to anti-regime allies about regime activities, this chapter focuses on the Green Movement because the Green Movement is the one opposition group in Iran that calls for reform through nonviolent activism.

Nonviolent activism poses the biggest threat to the Iranian regime. Nonviolent activism increases the credibility of the movement, domestically and within the international community, and does not give regime justification for violent crackdown. The "Green Movement" was born when older nonviolent opposition movements in Iran consolidated and re-branded themselves immediately following the June 12, 2009, Iranian presidential election. Abdolkarim Soroush, scholar, reform-movement founder, and manifesto signatory, articulates the evolution of the Green Movement: "And now we have the Green Movement, which is a culmination of the (pre-June 12, 2009, presidential

election) reform movement, a new stage.”<sup>66</sup> From here onward in this thesis, the opposition movement will be what is referred to as the Green Movement.

The biggest question with reference to whether there will be imminent Iranian regime reform is, “How strong is the Green Movement?” An analysis of the Green Movement’s strengths and weaknesses can assist policy makers in determining if the movement will succeed on its own, as well as determining if intervention in aspects of where the Green Movement is weak would help in its goal of regime reform. The first step in is to determine how strong the Green Movement is now.

Turmoil erupted in Iran immediately following the June 12, 2009, presidential election. Protests with estimates of as many as three million demonstrators turned out in the streets to voice their dissatisfaction with the current regime and the perceived fraudulent election results.<sup>67</sup> Many Iranian citizens believed the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to his second term in office was an outrage. During Ahmadinejad’s first term, Iran’s economic condition declined, unemployment increased, and the repression of civil liberties such as freedoms of speech and assembly continued. In addition, many Iranian citizens were questioning the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader. The three months following the presidential election demonstrated to the regime and the people of Iran that a significant number of Iranian citizens were willing to take to the streets and demand major changes in the Iranian government. However, starting in early 2010, the number and size of demonstrations have waned.

In the months following the 2009 election, there seemed to be a real chance for the Green Movement to affect regime reform. Now, commentators tend to think otherwise. Fareed Zakaria, a columnist for *Newsweek*, wrote: “I do not think that it [the Green Movement] is likely to overthrow the Iranian regime. To believe that, one has to believe the government in Tehran is deeply unpopular with a majority of Iranians, holds

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<sup>66</sup> Robin Wright, “Abdolkarim Soroush: The Goals of Iran’s Green Movement,” *csmonitor.com*, January 6, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2010/0106/Abdolkarim-Soroush-The-goals-of-Iran-s-reen-Movement> (accessed January 8, 2010).

<sup>67</sup> Hana Makhmalbaf, “Makhmalbaf Opens Up on the Green Movement,” *Pbs.org*, October 14, 2009, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/10/makhmalbaf-opens-up-on-green-movement.html> (accessed February 20, 2010).

onto power through military force alone, and is thus vulnerable to a movement that could mobilize the vast majority in Iran who despise it. None of this is entirely true.”<sup>68</sup> However, the Green Movement has not gone away and still commands significant numbers of supporters. Social Movement Theory may be a way to determine if the Green Movement still has a chance to affect change.

#### **A. ANALYSIS USING SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY**

Social Movement Theory is a method of analysis and understood format in which the Green Movement’s strengths and weaknesses can be understood in relation to other social movements. Social Movement Theory provides for a comprehensive, interconnected understanding by producing a set of shared working questions, concepts, and lines of theory.<sup>69</sup> Social movements occur when “under authoritarian rule, the masses lack formal political access to mitigate the adverse effects of . . . the deterioration of quality of life.”<sup>70</sup> Three broad sets of factors outlined by Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald are used in the analysis of the Green Movement. These factors are: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes.<sup>71</sup> Also, the grievances—the strains that produced collective action—of the Green Movement are identified and discussed in order to relate why many Iranian citizens took to the streets in protest to demand reform of the Iranian government.

#### **B. GRIEVANCES**

The Green Movement’s list of grievances demands greater civil liberties, political reform through new constitutional amendments, and even the condemnation of the Supreme Leader.

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<sup>68</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “McCain’s Mistake,” *Newsweek*, June 28 & July 5, 2010: 24.

<sup>69</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Introduction: Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory,” *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz, 1-33 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, “Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes,” 8.

<sup>71</sup> McAdam, “Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes,” 2.

The perceived fraudulent and illegitimate presidential election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2009 was the flashpoint that ignited the brewing unrest of millions of people toward the Iranian regime. Millions of Iranians realized their “shared collective rage” over the election outcome, but more so, they also realized they “shared collective values and vision” for a change in their government.<sup>72</sup> Initially, protesters contested the election, but as weeks passed after the election, they then started challenging the fundamental structure of the Islamic Republic.<sup>73</sup> The issues evolved to include demands for political change and condemnation of the Supreme Leader.<sup>74</sup> Political change meant not only a change in Iran’s conservative government and religious heads, but also more civil liberties that Iranian citizens believed should be their basic freedoms. Demands included “elimination of non-elected oversight councils, freedom of speech and press, minority rights, release of political prisoners and dismantling of the police state.”<sup>75</sup> Iranians were protesting authoritarian rule, state repression, and structural strains that were preventing them from having the quality of life they felt they deserved.

The Green Movement articulated their grievances and demands when they published their first manifesto in January 2010. The manifesto called for the “recognition of law-abiding political, student, non-governmental and women’s groups; labor unions; freedom for all means of mass communication; an independent judiciary, including popular election of the judicial chief.”<sup>76</sup> It had other specific demands as well—ten in all—including banning security forces from intervening in politics and the economy, calling for the resignation of Ahmadinejad, and freeing all political prisoners.<sup>77</sup> The second manifesto, published in June 2010, additionally called for stripping Ayatollah

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<sup>72</sup> Bevilacqua, “Free Iran: The Time is Now.”

<sup>73</sup> Patrick Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps: The Iranian Opposition, the Nuclear Issue, and the West,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus* #100 (January 2010): 1.

<sup>74</sup> Nesvanderani, “Iran’s Youth: The Protests are Not Over,” 2.

<sup>75</sup> Makhmalbaf, “Makhmalbaf Opens Up on Green Movement.”

<sup>76</sup> Wright. “Abdolkarim Soroush.”

<sup>77</sup> Wright. “Abdolkarim Soroush.”



Khamenei of his position as Supreme Leader because of his “unfairness.”<sup>78</sup> The specific demands in the first manifesto were worded in more general terms in the second manifesto. It called for the “implementation of new constitutional amendments” indicated that the unofficial leaders of the Green Movement were not seeking regime change, but regime reform. Reform could be accomplished using the existing framework of the Iranian constitution, and laws could be “amended according to different circumstances as well as national and public interests.”<sup>79</sup> Mehdi Karrubi, an unofficial leader of the Green Movement, member of the Expediency Discernment Council, and former chairman of the Iranian parliament, recently stated: “We’re saying that the regime must return to its main path. Fair and free elections must be held. Independent press must be shaped and they must have freedom of speech. Parties and fractions must have a right to be active, trade unions and difference [sic] sectors of the people must be recognized and their rights respected, and the constitution must fully be implemented.”<sup>80</sup>

One of the most significant points of the Green Movement’s manifesto is the demand to strip Ayatollah Khamenei of his position. His leadership is viewed by the opposition as “ruthless, unjust, and contrary to Islam, democracy, and human rights.”<sup>81</sup> Khamenei’s authoritarian rule has been a rallying point for the opposition to gain support. Collective outcry against his leadership has helped the opposition attract support in those parts of Iranian society that have seemed silent.<sup>82</sup> Khamenei’s religious authority has also been put into question. “Khamenei’s claims to religious authority have never been widely accepted by either the senior clergy or the pious public.”<sup>83</sup> But Khamenei firmly views his authority as just, and he views the Green Movement as a threat to his rule. He

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<sup>78</sup> Ardeshir Arian, “The Seven-Point Manifesto of the Iranian Resistance,” *pajamasmedia.com*, June 16, 2010, <http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/the-seven-point-manifesto-of-the-iranian-resistance/> (accessed June 17, 2010).

<sup>79</sup> “Karrubi: Islamic Republic has Derailed from its Path,” *en.irangreenvoice.com*, May 17, 2010, <http://en.irangreenvoice.com/article/2010/may/17/1895> (accessed May 20, 2010).

<sup>80</sup> “Karrubi: Islamic Republic has Derailed from its Path,” *en.irangreenvoice.com*, May 17, 2010, <http://en.irangreenvoice.com/article/2010/may/17/1895> (accessed May 20, 2010).

<sup>81</sup> Mehdi Khalaji, “One Year after a Rigged Election: Iran’s Introverted Politics,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch* #1667 (June 9, 2010): 1.

<sup>82</sup> Khalaji, “One Year after a Rigged Election: Iran’s Introverted Politics,” 3.

<sup>83</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 7.

views the Green Movement as an extension of the West's "soft war" against the Islamic Republic and therefore connected to Western governments and intelligence agencies.<sup>84</sup> He believes that the regime is entitled to crack down with all means at their disposal "as long as they [Green Movement activists] pursue subversive goals."<sup>85</sup> In his battle to crush any reform-minded thinkers, Khamenei has cracked down even on former colleagues and important political figures, jailed the heads of two prominent reformist groups, deprived reformists of any kind of media platform, and made it illegal to quote [Mir-Hosseini] Mousavi or [Mehdi] Karrubi in the press.<sup>86</sup>

### C. POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

The conditions for the rise and growth of social movement contention in regard to the Green Movement were analyzed to determine if conditions exist in suitable strength for the movement to effect change in the Iranian regime.

Political opportunity structures emerge when there are "changes in the institutional structure or informal power relations of a given national political system."<sup>87</sup> Power relations in Iran's political system have changed dramatically since the June 2009 elections. The presidential election was contested, there was the call for the removal of Iran's highest official, and there is evidence of broadening division in Iran's political elites. Besides instability of elite alignments, conditions for the rise and growth of social movement contention are: the availability of allies, nature of state repression, and the institutional strength of the state.<sup>88</sup>

An important factor in the emergence of any social movement is if citizens have substantive access to formal and informal policymaking channels. Citizens may seek other avenues for change if they lack access to policymaking channels. Public outcry is one means citizens call for changes in their government. When the outcry is loud

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<sup>84</sup> Khalaji, "One Year after a Rigged Election: Iran's Introverted Politics," 1.

<sup>85</sup> Khalaji, "One Year after a Rigged Election: Iran's Introverted Politics," 1.

<sup>86</sup> Khalaji, "One Year after a Rigged Election: Iran's Introverted Politics," 2.

<sup>87</sup> McAdam, "Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes," 3.

<sup>88</sup> Mohammad M. Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement," *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz, 61-88 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 65.

enough, sustained, and heard by millions of citizens, a social movement can be born. However, the movement needs political elites who will side with the public's discourse in order to gain enough traction to affect real change. Alliances of political elites in favor of the opposition can unify the cause under a common banner to reform the current system. As well, the instability of elite alliances of those who oppose reform will also help the movement by causing disunity and stagnation in their quest to stymie the opposition movement. In Iran, to a degree, there is both elite alliances and elite division.

Divisions within the ruling elite are increasingly apparent today.<sup>89</sup> Infighting "has grown more intense and complex," which has resulted in the regime's inability to come to a consensus on many issues, effectively making the regime ineffectual.<sup>90</sup> One indicator of the gradually widening fissures in the regime's power base is the divergence in conservative responses to recent events.<sup>91</sup> "A deep rift has emerged within it [the Iranian regime] since June 12 [2009], foreshadowed by the continuous rightward shift in Iranian politics over the past four years."<sup>92</sup> The quibbling over issues and emergence of tension is occurring "at the highest levels of Iran's power structure."<sup>93</sup> Examples of this are when Deputy Majlis speaker Muhammad Reza Bahonar accused Ahmadinejad of "purposefully" violating the law [concerning economic issues].<sup>94</sup> Others, such as Ahmad Jannati, the powerful Guardian Council secretary, stated, "post-election turmoil prevented us from criticizing Ahmadinejad's government, but it does not mean we are without criticism. . . How long must we keep silent?"<sup>95</sup> Ahmadinejad appears to lack a solid power base within the elite.<sup>96</sup> Iran's parliament, the Majlis, does not support Ahmadinejad on many issues, but many members are not bold enough to speak out

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<sup>89</sup> Khalaji, "One Year after a Rigged Election," 2.

<sup>90</sup> Clawson, "Much Traction from Measured Steps," 1.

<sup>91</sup> Brianna Rosen, "The Trials Continue: Defection Not an Option," *irantracker.org*, August 14, 2009, <http://irantracker.org/full-publication/trials-continue-defection-not-option> (accessed December 10, 2009).

<sup>92</sup> David Cvach, "How to Assess Political Fissures in Iran," *washingtoninstitute.org*, February 10, 2010, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3173> (accessed February 10, 2010).

<sup>93</sup> Rosen, "The Trials Continue."

<sup>94</sup> Khalaji, "One Year after a Rigged Election," 2.

<sup>95</sup> Khalaji, "One Year after a Rigged Election," 2.

<sup>96</sup> Khalaji, "One Year after a Rigged Election," 2.

directly against him in fear of going against the Supreme Leader. “Were it not for Khamenei’s backing, the Majlis could have opposed the president much more easily.”<sup>97</sup>

However, the claims of instability of elite alliances are contested. Ali Larijani, the speaker of Iran’s parliament, rejected the claims of “divisions” within the regime, blaming foreigners for attempting to “sow discord.”<sup>98</sup> And, many Middle East analysts report that “there is no significant elite challenge to the current political structure.”<sup>99</sup> In addition, there have been no “substantial defections” from members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps or Basij.<sup>100</sup> So, are there elite divisions? The answer is yes, but few. Elites desire to hold on to power and they have much to lose by openly being reform-minded, or in the least, sympathetic to the idea of any form of change. It is safer for them to side with the regime, which is still strong and firmly in place.

However, it may only take a small fissure to crack the establishment wide open. The Green Movement’s unofficial leaders, Mousavi and Karrubi, are highly respected elites with millions of supporters on the streets and sympathizers in Iran’s government. They have access to institutional politics through their political connections and colleagues. Allies in the Iranian government may be waiting for the right opportunity to show their support. It is likely that once quiet regime elites will speak out in support of reform measures if the Green Movement is able to regain significant traction.

Other allies may include reformist clerics. Two prominent clerics that have been linked to reformist thought are Hashemi Rafsanjani, Chairman of the Assembly of Experts and former president and Chairman of Iranian parliament, and Hassan Rowhani, member of the Supreme National Security Council and member of the Expediency Discernment Council and former Deputy Speaker of Majlis.<sup>101</sup> However, “the vast majority [of clerics] are politically docile, distancing themselves from such issues [that

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<sup>97</sup> Khalaji, “One Year after a Rigged Election,”2.

<sup>98</sup> Rosen, “The Trials Continue.”

<sup>99</sup> Flynt Leverett and Hillary M. Leverett, “Iran’s Green Movement Approaches Irrelevance: Why Does Washington Continue to Gamble on It?,” *mideast.foreignpolicy.com*, March 17, 2010, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/03/17/iran\\_s\\_green\\_movement\\_approaches\\_irrelevance\\_why\\_does\\_washington\\_continue\\_to\\_gamble](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/03/17/iran_s_green_movement_approaches_irrelevance_why_does_washington_continue_to_gamble) (accessed March 19, 2010).

<sup>100</sup> Charles Naas, “The ‘Greens’,” personal e-mail from author, March 24, 2010.

<sup>101</sup> Waleed Sadi, “No Turning Back,” *bittermons-international.org Middle East Roundtable* ed. 10 vol 8, (April 22, 2010).

are critical of the regime].”<sup>102</sup> Those who have spoken out against the regime, such as Ayatollahs Ali Hossein Montazeri and Yousef Sanei, had their offices shut down.<sup>103</sup> Ayatollah Ali Montazeri was the only cleric to boldly criticize the hardliners; however, he died in December, 2009.<sup>104</sup> The bottom line is that much of the clergy remains “silent on the sidelines.”<sup>105</sup>

State repression is another condition that allows for political opportunity. Socioeconomic issues, lack of civil liberties, and humans rights violations are forms of state repression. However, in the context of the Green Movement, state repression issues are better thought of as ways the movement members collectively share the same grievances; and thus, how they frame the reasons why they protest the regime. These issues will be discussed in detail under *Mobilizing Structures*.

The institutional strength of the state is strong. The regime’s authoritarian rule over its citizens is a main cause for protest. Many Iranians desire a less oppressive and obtrusive government. However, because the institutional strength of the state is strong (detailed in Chapter II), the state does not provide for any political opportunities for the Green Movement.

Another potential political opportunity for the Green Movement is the schism in the country over Iran’s nuclear weapons program. Only 38 percent of Iranians support both nuclear power and nuclear weapons.<sup>106</sup> And, in the eyes of many Iranians, “anything associated with Ahmadinejad is now unpopular, and that applies to the nuclear weapons program.”<sup>107</sup> The nuclear weapons issue could be an opportunity for political elites to pick sides. However, the Green Movement has chosen to remain silent on the nuclear impasse, and any other foreign policy issue, in order to not lose any of its support base. The impasse “muddies the waters; the opposition is better served by concentrating on

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<sup>102</sup> Cvach, “How to Assess Political Fissures in Iran.”

<sup>103</sup> Cvach, “How to Assess Political Fissures in Iran.”

<sup>104</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 6.

<sup>105</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 6.

<sup>106</sup> “An Analysis of Multiple Polls of the Iranian Public,” *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, February 3, 2010, [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/feb10/IranElection\\_Feb10\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/feb10/IranElection_Feb10_rpt.pdf) (accessed May 16, 2010).

<sup>107</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 11.

domestic concerns.”<sup>108</sup> “It is quite conceivable . . . that opposition leaders would take the more modest step on remaining silent on the issue.”<sup>109</sup>

There are other political opportunities for the Green Movement that do not exist yet, but may exist in the future. The death of either President Amadinejad or Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khanenei would result in a political void that could be filled by a more reform-minded leader. Another political opportunity is during the next presidential election in 2013. If a reform-minded president were elected, he would likely fill key government positions with like-minded people that would be willing to amend the Iranian constitution and enact laws to ensure more freedoms for the Iranian people. In the meantime, the Green movement is, and should continue, working on increasing the public stature of reform-minded leaders. Increasing the stature of reform-minded leaders gives the ideology of the Green movement more credence, and as well, could help influence who the Guardian Council will allow to run as a candidate in 2013 presidential election.

#### **D. MOBILIZING STRUCTURES**

This section analyzes the many forms of mobilizing structures used by the Green Movement. Material, moral, human, cultural, and socio-organizational mobilizing structures all exist within the Green Movement and prove that the Green Movement has a wide array of means to support its cause.

Mobilizing structures are “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action.”<sup>110</sup> Examples of formal vehicles for mobilization are: the mosque, non-government organizations, professional and student organizations, and political parties. Informal vehicles for mobilization could be informal urban networks or other social networks. Social networks and informal resources for mobilization are especially common in less open societies where visibility is dangerous.<sup>111</sup> This is the case with the Green Movement in Iran. There are no formal organizations that formally resource the Green Movement. If any had briefly existed,

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<sup>108</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 11.

<sup>109</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 12.

<sup>110</sup> McAdam, “Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes,” 3.

<sup>111</sup> Wiktorowicz, “Introduction: Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory,” 12.

they were likely shut down immediately by the regime. The Green Movement, instead, relies heavily on informal vehicles to keep the movement alive and organize protests. Various social movement communities are the mobilizing structures that are used to carry out the necessary functions of the movement. These functions include the ability to “recruit like-minded individuals, socialize new participants, overcome the free rider problem, and mobilize contention.”<sup>112</sup>

Social movement communities are often born when “opportunity spaces” exist. Opportunity spaces are “fora of social interaction that create new opportunities for augmenting networks of shared meaning and associated life.”<sup>113</sup> They create the possibility for the entrance and enhancement of new movement voices, perspectives, and projects.<sup>114</sup> Opportunity spaces can exist in private homes, school classrooms, at a protest, or in a break room at work. For the Green Movement, the opportunity space for political fora exists when debate on reformist issues occurs in parliament or during a protest. Electronic media cyberspace is another arena used by both Green movement activists and those still seeking information about the movement. The marketplace is an opportunity space arena where the bazaaris come together and discuss political issues that affect their lives. Each of these opportunity spaces provides an opportunity for the Green Movement to recruit like-minded individuals, socialize new participants, overcome the free rider problem, and mobilize contention. It is in these places that the Green Movement was born and stays alive. These informal locations allow the movement to exist spontaneously and everywhere, making it nearly impossible for the Iranian regime to crush the movement with a single blow.

Mobilizing structures is just another way of describing resources that can enable and assist a social movement to prosper. Scholars suggest that there are five types of

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<sup>112</sup> Glen E. Robinson, “ Hamas as a Social Movement,” *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz, 112-39 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 116.

<sup>113</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, “Opportunity Spaces, Identity, and Islamic Meaning in Turkey,” *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz, 270-88 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 272.

<sup>114</sup> Yavuz, “Opportunity Spaces,” 285.

resources.<sup>115</sup> The first is material. Material is money and physical capital, of which the Green Movement has none. The material of the Green Movement comes from each of the protesters in the form of banners, posters, graffiti, and green cloth. Because of the advent and popularity of cyberspace, many resources that before would cost money, such as flyers and television ads, are no longer needed. The Green Movement has technical and digital capabilities that give it mechanisms to connect its members and mobilize them.<sup>116</sup> Cell phone texts, Internet blogs, and e-mails are all are needed to effectively distribute the movement's messages.

The second type of mobilizing structure resource is moral. The Green Movement appeals to a broad swath of society because it calls for less government oppression and civil liberties. These are ideas that resonate as basic freedoms that every person deserves. However, there is a lack of solidarity in Iran in the desire for these aims. Many citizens in Iran still support the regime or choose to remain politically silent. This reaction may be out of fear or out of devotion to the Islamic Republic's pious foundation. Also, many Iranians may not support all of the movement's goals. For example, they may agree with freedom of speech and women's rights, but not agree with the removal of the president or Supreme Leader from office.

The third type of mobilizing structure resource is human. The human resource refers to the volunteers, staff, and leaders of the movement.<sup>117</sup> While volunteers and staff indicate that there are formal mobilizing structures, there is no evidence of "official" leaders or a formal institution supporting the Green Movement. However, this could be the most important and beneficial aspect of the Green Movement's structure. "There's no head to decapitate, no way for the movement to be silenced in one catastrophic loss."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Bob Edwards and John D. McCarthy (2004). "Resources and Social Movement Mobilization," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, 116-52 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.).

<sup>116</sup> Noushin A. Khorasani, "Iran's Green Movement and the Myth of Shame of the Middle Class," *payvand.com*, December 4, 2009, <http://www.payvand.com/news/09/dec/1043.html> (accessed December 10, 2009).

<sup>117</sup> Edwards, "Resources and Social Movement Mobilization," 116-52.

<sup>118</sup> "The Green Movement: Countering Objections," *revmagdalen.blogspot.com*, November 22, 2009, <http://revmagdalen.blogspot.com/2009/11/green-movement-countering-objections.html> (accessed December 10, 2009).



The decentralized leadership of the movement means that anyone can spearhead the cause, allowing for diverse and creative ways of fighting for its goal.<sup>119</sup> Potentially, there is a pool of thousands to lead the battle for regime reform. “The true ‘leaders’ of the Green Movement are anonymous people who create, print, and distribute the posters that coordinate the demonstrations.”<sup>120</sup> However, three politically connected leaders with impressive credentials emerged as unofficial leaders of the Green Movement. Mir-Hossein Mousavi credentials include being a member of the Expediency Discernment Council, the former Prime Minister of Iran, and 2009 presidential candidate. Mehdi Karrubi credentials include being the former chairman of the Iranian parliament, a member of the Expediency Discernment Council, and a 2009 presidential candidate. Mohammad Khatami was the former president Iran, Minister of Culture, and 2009 presidential candidate.<sup>121</sup> Recently, only Mousavi and Karrubi are named the unofficial leaders of the Green Movement, and Khatami remains a vocal supporter of regime reform. These prominent and respected Iranian leaders give credence to the demands of the Green Movement as well as institutional access. Mousavi and Karrubi are mobilizing forces themselves because the Iranian citizens who supported them during their campaigns for president were mobilized to support them when they became leaders in the Green Movement.

The fourth type of mobilizing structure resource is cultural. Cultural resources refer to such things as prior activist experience, collective action know-how, and understanding the issues.<sup>122</sup> There is no lack of accessibility to information about the issues because of the ease of distribution of information through cyberspace, that is, at least for those who have access to cyberspace. Access to cyberspace may be a major reason why the Green Movement is a movement of the urban middle class. The poor and those living in rural areas are likely to not have the same access to cyber media, thus, not

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<sup>119</sup> Makhmalbaf, “Makhmalbaf Opens Up on Green Movement.”

<sup>120</sup> “The Green Movement: Countering Objections,” *revmagdalen.blogspot.com*, November 22, 2009, <http://revmagdalen.blogspot.com/2009/11/green-movement-countering-objections.html> (accessed December 10, 2009).

<sup>121</sup> Wright, “Abdolkarim Soroush.”

<sup>122</sup> Edwards, “Resources and Social Movement Mobilization,” 116–52.

allowing them anonymous communication and information gathering about the Green Movement's agenda and goals. The poor and rural population in Iran must partake in much riskier face-to-face communication where the risk of loss of anonymity may not be worth the effort. The exact extent of Green Movement support from rural areas and the lower class is not known. There is not a "clear picture of the full extent of the movement and its penetration in the various urban and rural classes and traditional leadership."<sup>123</sup> The Green Movement may be able to broaden their support base if the movement can figure out a way to more effectively communicate with these groups of society. Satellite television ads could be one medium, if only the Green Movement had the funding and they could get around the regime's censors. When it comes to issues of activist experience and collective action know-how, only a very small minority of the movement's supporters have any. The two unofficial leaders of the Green Movement, Mousavi and Karrubi, witnessed collective action during the 1979 Iranian Revolution, but the vast majority of current movement supporters are Iran's youth who do not remember or were not alive in 1979.

Socio-organizational resources help in the mobilization of a movement. These resources, comprising of social networks that enable recruitment and allow for organizations to strategize the dissemination of their messages, are prevalent in the social networks of Iran's students and youth. All statistics in this paragraph are taken from Tara Nesvanderani's article on Iranian youth.<sup>124</sup> Iran's youth, as defined between the ages of 15 and 29, account for 35 percent of Iran's total population and they constitute nearly 40 percent of the electorate. "Iran has the most politically active youth among the 57 nations of the Islamic world." Because of their political activism, Iran's youth are extremely important in defining Iran's political, economic, and social agenda. The youth are one of the two main agents of change, along with women, now challenging the rigid Islamic rule. A large number of Green Movement members are students. They have rallied en masse to call for regime reform because the regime "has failed to address the basic socioeconomic problems among youth." The regime has been ineffective in addressing

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<sup>123</sup> Naas, "The 'Greens'."

<sup>124</sup> Nesvanderani, "Iran's Youth," 1-5.

their basic needs. Iran has a chronic job shortage. The government is able to generate only 300, 000 of the more than one million jobs needed annually to absorb young people joining entering the labor market. The educational system has not been able to keep up, turning away 80 percent of those to take the university entrance exams. Even with a university degree, it takes an average of three years to find a job. Youth account for 80 percent of the unemployed. Only one in four males is able to find a job, and only one in two females. And, there is a large housing shortage. These issues apply to other Iranians as well. Another reason for the discontent among Iran's youth is that they are better educated and more worldly than any previous generation. "Most are regularly exposed to global media, ideas and culture through satellite television and Internet. Iran boasts 60,000 to 110,000 active blogs. Most young Iranians are believed to want to be part of the international community and globalization. They see that the current government is not providing what other nations' governments are providing their citizens.

Iran's youth are resilient in calling for reform despite crackdowns by the regime and harsh punishments of those who are arrested. "Despite the crackdowns that stopped all major protests, students kept the opposition movement alive in smaller protests at universities in Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan, Mazandran, and Kurdistan."<sup>125</sup> There were mass arrests, expulsion and sentencing of students to long prison terms for "violating national security and promoting propaganda against the regime."<sup>126</sup>

The youth are also responsible for many of the social networks that keep the Green Movement alive. As a mobilizing force, social networks are the "most viable means of building movements within the current political environment. They are also important transmission belts of collective identity, drawing the ideas, sensibilities, and reflexivity of the people together while criss-crossing social, economic and political hierarchies."<sup>127</sup> In such, there are several youth organizations that are aligned with the same ideologies as the Green Movement. The Office for Consolidating Unity is Iran's

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<sup>125</sup> Nesvanderani, "Iran's Youth," 2.

<sup>126</sup> Nesvanderani, "Iran's Youth," 3.

<sup>127</sup> Diane Singerman, "The Networked World of Islamist Social Movements," *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz, 143-63 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 144.

largest student movement has the agenda of individual rights under Islamic rule. This student organization was the forefront of the Green Movement protests calling people to the streets through social networks.<sup>128</sup> Students for Freedom and Equality campaign against military and intelligence agents on campuses. United Student Front is a radical secular group that is opposed to the nonsecular Islamic Republic. Iran also has dozens of political parties and youth wings. Major reform parties include the Islamic Iran Participation Front, Islamic Revolution Mujahadin, the National Trust Party, the Freedom Movement of Iran, and The Youth Party of Iran.<sup>129</sup>

Other organized networks that act as a conduit and mobilizing force for reformist thought are civil societies in Iran. The One Million Signature Campaign aims to alter discriminatory laws on women and children, the Committee of Human Rights Reporters documents human rights violations, and the Committee for Defense of Political Prisoners is an advocate prisoner rights.<sup>130</sup>

One other potential mobilizing vehicle for the Green Movement is in the defections and divisions within Iran's political elites. As of yet, elite defection has not occurred to any significant extent. But, divisions within the elite "are obvious in what some leaders say and in what other leaders are not allowed to say."<sup>131</sup> Perceived or not, internal divisions threaten the foundation of the regime because the idea preoccupies the regime leaders, thus taking away their ability to build strong alliances that would strengthen the regime and its motives. As well, elite divisions can indicate regime weaknesses and can then mobilize reformist-minded citizens to take advantage of the perceived weakness. If elite divisions appear significant, it could sway those citizens who, in the past, remained silent to finally vocally join the side of the reformers. Because elite divisions can widen the fissures between political elites resulting in lines being drawn and sides being taken, elite defections can be viewed as political opportunity as much as a potential mobilizing force. So far, the regime seems to be able to hold on to its

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<sup>128</sup> Nesvanderani, "Iran's Youth," 4.

<sup>129</sup> Nesvanderani, "Iran's Youth," 4.

<sup>130</sup> Nesvanderani, "Iran's Youth," 4.

<sup>131</sup> Clawson, "Much Traction from Measured Steps," 3.

strength. There are indicators of division among political figures, but the very powerful IRGC remains strong. “Although the IRGC has seen its legitimacy corroded, it has not become weakened.”<sup>132</sup> And, reports indicate that an IRGC coup is unlikely.<sup>133</sup>

## E. FRAMING PROCESSES

The Green Movement has been successful in framing its messages in a way that resonates with a large percentage of Iranians. The Green Movement has accomplished this by having an ideology with a broad appeal, distinguishing characteristics from other political movements, and powerful symbols.

Framing processes allow “individual participants conceptualize themselves as a collectivity; how potential participants are actually convinced to participate; and the ways in which meaning is produced, articulated and disseminated.”<sup>134</sup> Frames make sense of experiences.<sup>135</sup> Proper framing of an issue can “elicit participation as a response to a perceived moral duty of obligation.”<sup>136</sup> To be successful in eliciting high levels of participation, the movement must be able to provide clear summations of its ideology that resonate with its target audience. Proper framing resonates in a way that provides “language that captures or constricts the meaning of problems.”<sup>137</sup> Using recognized rhetoric and symbols are two ways for the movement to identify itself easily and distinctly. Another necessary attribute of the messages is that they need to be framed in simple language that offers a “bumper-sticker version of its broader ideology.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 6.

<sup>133</sup> Roland Popp, “Iran: Domestic Crisis and Options for the West,” *CSS Analysis in Security Policy* No. 59 (September 2009): 3.

<sup>134</sup> Wiktorowicz, “Introduction: Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory,” 15.

<sup>135</sup> Wiktorowicz, “Introduction: Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory,” 15.

<sup>136</sup> Carrie R. Wickham, “Interests, Ideas, and Islamist Outreach in Egypt,” *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz, 231–49 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 232.

<sup>137</sup> Gwenn Okruhlik, “Making Conversation Permissible: Islamism and Reform in Saudi Arabia,” *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz, 250-69 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 251.

<sup>138</sup> Robinson, “ Hamas as a Social Movement,” 129.

Focusing on its positive attributes, the Green Movement has done well in framing its message.

The Green Movement has many attributes for success. The challenge for the movement is to frame those attributes in a manner that resonates with enough citizens so that the movement has overwhelming support. The first attribute that the Green Movement has is the sheer numbers of Iranians that want a say in the future of Iran. Forty million turned out at the polls for the June 12, 2009, elections, and three million protested the election results on June 15, 2009.<sup>139</sup> Second, the Green Movement has “breadth, depth, and weight.”<sup>140</sup> The movement encompasses a large swath of society, notably across classes and ethnicities. It also “boasts the backing of public intellectuals and artists, students, and some top clerics.”<sup>141</sup> Having the support of influential top clerics allows for a source of mobilization in an Islamic-based society. The movement also extends to the diaspora. Third, the decentralized leadership of the movement means that anyone can spearhead the cause, allowing for diverse and creative ways of fighting for its goal.<sup>142</sup> However, decentralized leadership can be a source of weakness because it allows divergent efforts and messages. Fourth, the movement has potent symbols. Two of the most recognized symbols of the Green Movement are the color green and the “V” sign. Finally, the movement is “civil, peaceful, and secular.” The Green Movement promotes nonviolent protest, strives for civil rights, and rejects political Islam.<sup>143</sup>

The Green Movement has characteristics that distinguish it from other political movements. The non-ideological nature of the Green Movement keeps it from bearing any direct relation to other ideologies, such as anti-imperialism, nationalism, Islamism, or socialism.<sup>144</sup> The youth and urban middle classes are the principle social base of the movement. The youth, particularly the university students—3.5 million young Iranians

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<sup>139</sup> Makhmalbaf, “Makhmalbaf Opens Up on Green Movement.”

<sup>140</sup> Makhmalbaf, “Makhmalbaf Opens Up on Green Movement.”

<sup>141</sup> Makhmalbaf, “Makhmalbaf Opens Up on Green Movement.”

<sup>142</sup> Makhmalbaf, “Makhmalbaf Opens Up on Green Movement.”

<sup>143</sup> Makhmalbaf, “Makhmalbaf Opens Up on Green Movement.”

<sup>144</sup> Tahavori, “Interview with Dr. Banuazizi.”

currently enrolled in universities and other institutions of higher learning—play a key role in the movement.<sup>145</sup> Spontaneity allows the movement to respond to changing conditions and opportunities, and the use of modern tools of communication, such as cell phones, Facebook, Twitter, etc., “greatly facilitated to spread the news, the protesters’ ability to communicate among themselves and with the outside world, and thus significantly increased the reach and impact of the movement.”<sup>146</sup> One of the main reasons for the Green Movement’s success is that it has adopted a nonviolent strategy as a framing mechanism. If the Green Movement chose to use violence, it “would give the regime the excuse to justify its repressive measures.”<sup>147</sup> The pluralist nature, too, allows the movement to be inclusive “both in relation to different groups inside Iran and to the politically active Iranian diaspora.”<sup>148</sup> The pluralist nature also allows the movement to restrict monopolistic ideological tendencies enabling it to remain appealing to a wide breadth of Iranian citizens. The movement’s distinctive demands for free and honest elections and respect for human and civil rights “has been hailed the world over.”<sup>149</sup> And finally, the Green Movement’s main aim—its emphasis on freedom and democracy—is “the most politically advantageous feature of the Green Movement” because of its broad appeal.<sup>150</sup>

The Green Movement has been relatively successful in encapsulating its distinctive characteristics and positive attributes using powerful forms of symbolism that have resonated with millions of supporters. The movement has adopted recognized rhetoric and symbols to identify it easily and distinctly and offer a clear summation of its ideology. Protesters publicly denounced the regime’s legitimacy at the highest levels of leadership chanting the slogan “Where’s my vote?” following the perceived fraudulent election of Ahmadinejad. As the initial rallying cry of the Green Movement, this slogan resonated deeply with millions of protesters. Since the initial protests, newer slogans

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<sup>145</sup> Tahavori, “Interview with Dr. Banuazizi.”

<sup>146</sup> Tahavori, “Interview with Dr. Banuazizi.”

<sup>147</sup> Tahavori, “Interview with Dr. Banuazizi.”

<sup>148</sup> Tahavori, “Interview with Dr. Banuazizi.”

<sup>149</sup> Tahavori, “Interview with Dr. Banuazizi.”

<sup>150</sup> Tahavori, “Interview with Dr. Banuazizi.”

such as “Khamenei is a murderer, his leadership is illegitimate!” and “Independence, Freedom, Iranian Republic!” have become some of the rallying cries for change in the Iranian regime.<sup>151</sup>

Another distinctive symbol of the Green movement is the color green. Protesters often wear green garments and use green paint on banners and posters. There are several possible reasons why the color green became the color of the movement. It is also the color of the reformist presidential candidate Mousavi’s political party, the National Trust Party. The color green is associated with Islam because the Quran says that the inhabitants of paradise will wear green garments of fine silk. Color theorists suggest that green represents life and renewal. It also is considered a restful color bringing feelings of balance, harmony, and stability—all attributes that the Green Movement wants to represent.<sup>152</sup> The Green Movement’s ideology is conceptualized readily with the color green.

In one instance, a single event became a symbol of the Green Movement’s struggle against a ruthless and authoritarian regime. That instance was the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, a young Iranian philosophy student who was killed during protests on June 2, 2009. Neda’s death “generated much anger, which strengthened the opposition.”<sup>153</sup>

Green Movement leaders, namely Mousavi and Karrubi, have repeatedly framed the Green Movement as a reform movement. It is a reform movement not only because it pursues the civil demands of broad sections of the population, but also because it seeks changes in the regime, not revolution for regime change. Mousavi advocates compromise with the Iranian regime to reach a middle line. Mousavi “maintains that the constitution holds great potential and must be revived.”<sup>154</sup> He has been pressing his supporters to remain within the confines of the constitution of the Islamic Republic. Mousavi stated, “We demand the unconditional enactment of the constitution and return

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<sup>151</sup> Maseh Zarif, “Escalating Confrontation on Ashura,” *irantracker.org*, December 29, 2009, <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/escalating-confrontation-ashura> (accessed on January 10, 2010).

<sup>152</sup> Glen Hawkins, “The Green Revolution,” *451heat.com*, June 22, 2009, <http://51heat.com/2009/06/22/the-green-revolution/> (accessed on December 10, 2009).

<sup>153</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 3.

<sup>154</sup> Makhmalbaf, “Makhmalbaf Opens Up on Green Movement.”



of the Islamic Republic to its original ethical foundations. We demand an Islamic Republic, not a word more, not a word less.’ Meanwhile, protesters were calling for the creation of an Iranian Republic to replace the Islamic Republic.”<sup>155</sup> This position by the leaders of the Green Movement divides it with respect to its ultimate aims. “Mousavi, Khatami, Rafsanjani and others appear to want a more transparent and humane rule [with] a continuance of the religious leadership . . . and many want an end to that rule and a more secular society with ties to the West.”<sup>156</sup> In addition to the demand for free elections and civil liberties, it seems that the idea of the “absolute rule of the supreme jurist [velayat-e faqih-e motlaqeh] is no longer acceptable to the majority of Iranians.”<sup>157</sup> “The true leaders of the opposition—students, women, human rights activists, and political activists—have little desire to work in a theocratic regime or in a government within the frame work of the existing constitution.”<sup>158</sup>

Although there are deep and concerning differences in what many protesters are calling for and what the Green Movement’s leaders are calling for, Mousavi is trying hard to unify the movement’s efforts. He stressed the importance of a unified approach and the strengthening of interactions within the movement as well as relying on the common values that unite the diverse segments within it.<sup>159</sup> The idea is to frame the Green Movement as a movement that appeals to the demands of a broad range of society. The movement does appear to be drawing in a broad range of society through the demonstrations.<sup>160</sup>

One argument against the Green Movement is that its demands are “mainly the very immediate demands of the middle class.”<sup>161</sup> Conversely, but yet another argument criticizing the Green Movement, is that the current diversity weakens the strength of the

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<sup>155</sup> Yaghmaiam, “Iran’s Green Movement Spreading Despite Crackdown.”

<sup>156</sup> Naas, “The ‘Greens’.”

<sup>157</sup> Tahavori, “Interview with Dr. Banuazizi.”

<sup>158</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 6.

<sup>159</sup> “Mousavi: Green Movement Eradicates Ignorance,” *en.greenvoice.com*, May 3, 2010, <http://en.irangreenvoice.com/article/2010/may/03/1800> (accessed May 20, 2010).

<sup>160</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 3.

<sup>161</sup> Khorasani, “Iran’s Green Movement and the Myth of Shame of the Middle Class.”

movement. Attempting to satisfy the demands of all the people is “practically impossible and not logical, because such a great expectation in such a large scale will force the movement to expand and add to its demands too much in order to attract everybody to the movement.”<sup>162</sup> Despite the many different motives of the movement’s supporters, the Green Movement has been able to maintain support because of its broad range of demands. “In the era of tele-communications and when the world has become a village with billions of different motives, demands and tastes, the “specific demands” of one class or layer of society do not necessarily have to be the demands of “all the people” anymore.”<sup>163</sup>

## **F. SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY SUMMARY**

The Green Movement contains enough attributes of Social Movement Theory to be considered a social movement. With this identification, the Green Movement has enough attributes in place to be viewed as a significant threat to the Iranian regime. The Green Movement has “succeeded in damaging the regime’s legitimacy, weakening the appeal of the populist, self-promoting public ceremonies, and making it costlier for the government to stage any future rigged elections.”<sup>164</sup> In addition to pressures from the Green Movement, the regime also faces popular disenchantment, elite fragmentation, international pressure, and economic distress.<sup>165</sup> Several political opportunities are present for the Green Movement, and more may arise with the presidential elections in 2013 when new leaders that are sympathetic to the reformists’ cause could come into positions of power. Another positive attribute of the Green Movement is that it has been very successful in framing its cause in a manner that has motivated those who support the movement do so vehemently. However, the Green Movement does not have any formal mobilizing structures to support it with resources or give the movement formal and

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<sup>162</sup> Khorasani, “Iran’s Green Movement and the Myth of Shame of the Middle Class.”

<sup>163</sup> Khorasani, “Iran’s Green Movement and the Myth of Shame of the Middle Class.”

<sup>164</sup> Khalaji, “One Year after a Rigged Election: Iran’s Introverted Politics,” 3.

<sup>165</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, “From Conciliation to Coercion,” *cfr.org*, February 11, 2010, [http://www.cfr.org/publication/21427/from\\_conciliation\\_to\\_coercion.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/21427/from_conciliation_to_coercion.html) (accessed February 15, 2010).

unified direction. Another challenge that remains for the Green Movement is to gain the support of those who have not voiced support yet, the rural, and the lower class.

The Green Movement has many appealing attributes that may still sway these groups to side with the movement, if only they can find a way to inform and communicate effectively with those who have not come out in support. The demand for more civil liberties and less repressive rule are issues that are appealing to most Iranians. As well, many Iranians desire to be less isolated from the rest of the world; they want inclusion and coexistence—another desire for the Green Movement.<sup>166</sup> A “priority for many Iranians is joining the world and ending cultural isolation.”<sup>167</sup> The Green Movement’s most appealing attribute may be in its method of demanding change. Its nonviolent approach is lauded by vocal Green Movement supporters, silent sympathizers, and the international community.

However, despite having many positive attributes and millions of supporters, it does not appear that the Green Movement will affect regime reform in the near future. The regime’s crackdowns on protests in 2010 have made the Green Movement appear to have stalled. Because of the lack of visible support in recent months, it now even appears that the movement is shrinking. “Events on the ground continue to confirm our assessment that the social base for the Green Movement is shrinking, not growing.”<sup>168</sup> The regime’s plan—their “soft war”—for dealing with the Green Movement appears to have been effective. The regime launched “a comprehensive campaign to crack down on the new social media practices such as Facebook and blogging, to purge universities and the traditional media reformers, to arrest activists prior to planned demonstration dates, and to win over young minds, starting in elementary school.”<sup>169</sup> The regime’s “soft war”

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<sup>166</sup> Yaghmaiam, “Iran’s Green Movement Spreading Despite Crackdown.”

<sup>167</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 11.

<sup>168</sup> Leverett, “Iran’s Green Movement Approaches Irrelevance.”

<sup>169</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 9.

campaign has been so effective that many writers on the Green Movement now share the feeling that “the prospect of a quick and easy change of regime in Tehran seems remote.”<sup>170</sup>

There are two other very significant factors in why the Green Movement is waning. First, there is the risk of retribution by the regime. Retribution could come in many forms such as job loss, expulsion from school, imprisonment, injury, or even death. One Iranian citizen stated, “I would not be willing to risk life or limb simply to change slightly the powers of the [Supreme] Leader.”<sup>171</sup> The other reason for the Green Movement’s failure to enlist the support of the entire nation is the revulsion to upsetting the status quo, both in the form of the regime’s current leadership and the disruption to society. “Most Iranians . . . are not attracted by the prospect of sustained political and social disruption.”<sup>172</sup>

Whatever the reasons for the Green Movement’s inability to reach the “tipping point” where it has overwhelming support that would force regime reform, the leaders of the Green Movement believe that the grievances are strong enough so that the Iranian regime will eventually have to reform its current domestic policies. The spokesman for Mir-Hossein Mousavi, Abdolkarim Soroush stated:

Not meeting these [demands] of the Green Movement and increasing the [violent] crackdown and oppression will not only not help us to pass the [present] crisis, but it will also deepen the crisis with painful consequences, for which only the Supreme Leader will be responsible.<sup>173</sup>

Mousavi himself has called for patience. Mousavi stated on his website in early 2010 that, “we have to call the next year the year of patience and endurance until the aims of the Green Movement are achieved.”<sup>174</sup> Patience is exactly what the Green Movement will need to affect reform in the Iranian regime.

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<sup>170</sup> Bruce Reidel, “Think Long, and Don’t get Boxed In,” *bittermons-international.org Middle East Roundtable* ed. 10 vol 8, (April 22, 2010).

<sup>171</sup> Naas, “The ‘Greens’.”

<sup>172</sup> Leverett, “Iran’s Green Movement Approaches Irrelevance.”

<sup>173</sup> Wright. “Abdolkarim Soroush.”

<sup>174</sup> Leverett, “Iran’s Green Movement Approaches Irrelevance.”

## IV. OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSEQUENCES

### A. SHOULD THE U.S.. INTERVENE IN IRAN TO PROMOTE REGIME REFORM?

U.S.. intervention in Iran using instruments of soft power designed to promote reform and weaken the Iranian regime would likely yield results if undertaken in a nuanced fashion. As established in Chapter I, it is within U.S.. national interests to intervene in Iran to promote regime reform. Also, as found in Chapter II, the Iranian regime is strong enough to suppress the Green Movement on its own. In Chapter III, weaknesses in the Green Movement were identified that, if strengthened, could propel the movement to affect reform in the Iranian regime. Although it seems probable that the Green Movement will eventually affect regime reform, if U.S.. support is not provided soon, the next opportunity for Iranian regime reform may not come until after Iran develops a nuclear weapons capability.

The motivation for the United States to intervene in Iran extends beyond U.S.. national interests of spreading democratic ideals, limiting human rights violations, and preventing nations from supporting terrorist organizations. If the Green Movement is able to affect regime reform, then the United States could begin to deal with a “new” Iran. A more Western-friendly Iranian government may be open to new trade agreements and discussion of Iran not acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. A “new” Iran without an authoritarian and brutish regime could calm the fears of the rest of the Middle East of an Iranian hegemony.

If the Green Movement succeeds, it will create a democratic nation which would very likely end up being an ally of other democratic nations against dictatorships in the Middle East. A democratic and non-theocratic Iran could be reasoned with so it would stop funding Hamas and Hezbollah and sending IEDs to Taliban in Afghanistan and al-Qaeda in Iraq. Helping them is essentially furthering U.S.. interests in the region.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Shahryar, “Can the U.S.. Help Iran’s Green Movement?”

The United States has three options in regard to Iran. The first option is that the United States can choose to not intervene and see if the Green Movement can succeed on its own over time. The benefit of this option is that the Green Movement could not be delegitimized by being linked to the United States. The consequence for the United States is that regime reform to a more democratic state could take longer, or not happen at all. The second option is that the United States could intervene overtly to support the Green Movement. The benefit is that the international community and the Green Movement would clearly know that it had the support of the United States. A consequence for the United States is that the Green Movement could presume a commitment by the United States to the Green Movement and the Iranian people. The third option is for the United States to assist the Green Movement covertly. The benefit of this option is that it would be difficult for the regime to prove that the Green Movement was illegitimate because it was linked to the United States. The consequence for the United States is that, if discovered, diplomatic negotiations with Iran could become more difficult.

The Green Movement may not accept support U.S.. support if it is offered. The Green Movement desires to be seen as a legitimate movement with legitimate grievances. Any link to “corrupted” Western nations—especially the United States—would be harmful to the movement by allowing the regime to “demonize and discredit the opposition as American pawns and puppets.”<sup>176</sup> If the United States chose to intervene either overtly or covertly, the United States would need to convince the Green Movement that U.S.. support will help them affect regime reform sooner. The United States cannot intervene without their support, so the United States should explain “first, that resolution of the nuclear issue would benefit the Iranian people and, second, that the United States has long experience at pressing dictatorships on human rights.”<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, the United States would need to express to the Green Movement that any support given would be to enhance their efforts, and U.S.. support would not dominate or intentionally harm their efforts. The Green Movement would be able to accept or deny any support

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<sup>176</sup> Marc Lynch, “So what now on Iran?,” *foreignpolicy.com*, February 11, 2010, [http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/02/11/so\\_what\\_now\\_on\\_iran](http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/02/11/so_what_now_on_iran) (accessed February 15, 2010).

<sup>177</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction from Measured Steps,” 14.

offered. All support efforts would retain an Iranian “face” where there would be no indication of U.S.. influence or motives. The U.S.. goals would be to assist in implementation and dissemination of Green Movement propaganda and to hone the messages of reformist themes. With the United States’ intent clearly laid out to Green Movement leaders, the United States may be able to convince the Green Movement that U.S.. support would be far more beneficial than harmful.

## **B. WHAT THE GREEN MOVEMENT NEEDS TO BE SUCCESSFUL**

There are four things that the Green Movement needs to be successful. They are: credibility, support of many key political and religious leaders, the support of a significant number of the Iranian population, and to be a significant threat to the regime where the regime feels that it would not be able to permanently suppress the movement. The Green Movement can maintain its credibility and legitimacy by continuing to be perceived as a movement of the *Iranian* people, representing true grievances of the citizens of Iran. The movement’s non-violent method of demanding reform is a powerful means in maintaining credibility. It suggests that movement does not want to do any harm, only good. The Green Movement needs to be wary of accepting support from non-Iranians. This could give ammunition for the regime to attack the Green Movement’s legitimacy by claiming that the movement is only a puppet of a foreign power. As mentioned previously, any external support received must avoid the perception of consisting of anything but the Green Movement’s own voice. Key political and religious leaders are necessary to change laws and affect reform within the government. Without the support of established key political and religious leaders, the Green Movement does not have a means to get reform measures passed through parliament. The support of a significant number of the population is necessary to display to key leaders that most of the Iranian people desire change. Key leaders need to be sensitive to what the people want and should press for reform measures if it appears that the grievances are supported by the majority of the people. Political and religious leaders may press for reform on their own if the Green Movement is perceived to be a significant threat to the regime. It comes down to an issue of self-preservation. If leaders fear that the regime may collapse

or change radically because of Green Movement pressure, those leaders will want to be seen as supporters of change so that they are not ousted from their current positions when change occurs.

There are several means in which the Green Movement can increase its odds for success. Some of these opportunities could be accomplished by the Green Movement alone, or United States assistance could be accepted to help strengthen the movement's influence.

## **C. OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNITED STATES INTERVENTION**

### **1. Framing Messages**

U.S. assets can help the Green Movement to frame its messages to get the maximum effect out of them. Information Operations consisting of Psychological Operations teams would work with existing Green Movement grievances to produce messages with just the right wording so that the themes resonate with many different sectors of Iranian society. The Green Movement already has several powerful slogans and symbols, but with help of professionals who know how to appeal to emotions through wording, the Green Movement may be able to appeal to Iranians who have not yet been vocally supportive. The goal of message framing is to increase recruitment and support.

Two themes to tap into are the women's movement and the student movement. The Green Movement and these two movements can mutually benefit each other. The Green Movement shares many of the same grievances as the women's movement, including the elimination of discrimination against women and changing discriminatory laws. In addition, the presence of women during protests contributes to less violence.<sup>178</sup> The Green Movement will be better able to maintain its non-violent tactic during future protests with more women present. Framing messages that resonate with the women's movement could draw more women to overtly support the Green Movement. Another

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<sup>178</sup> Parisa Kakaee, "Women's Movement: A Model for the Green Movement," gozaar.org, June 11, 2010, <http://www.gozaar.org/english/articles-en/Women-s-Movement-A-Model-for-the-Green-Movement.html> (accessed August 2, 2010).



movement, the student movement, is a large and diverse recruiting base for the Green Movement because “it serves as a cross-point for other individual movements such as women, labor, and ethnic group movements. The student movement effectively creates a space for a coalition on undecided positions among various groups.”<sup>179</sup> The institution of the University has a power of outreach and influence that is in many ways stronger than those of political parties due to the students’ ability to understand various forces and bring them together, then transmit this understanding and awareness through word-of-mouth to the general public.<sup>180</sup> In many ways, recruitment of students may be more important than the recruitment of the general public. Because much of Iran’s population is young and educated, Iran’s youth are gaining referential social status.<sup>181</sup> “Now, many families confidently look to their children for views on political issues.”<sup>182</sup> Messages that are framed to appeal to students will be passed on to their families. This is one way of getting messages to a sector of Iranians even if the family members are resistant to the ideology of the Green Movement.

## **2. Provide Media Platforms**

The United States can provide media platforms to transmit messages across Iran. Because of technology these platforms do not have to reside within Iran. The United States could provide a dedicated Internet server located in a third-party nation that could not be censored or blocked by the Iranian regime. This server could provide an unfiltered medium for pro-Green Movement communications. Green Movement-friendly websites and blogs could use this server to express opinions, recruit, frame messages, and organize events. Virtual Private Network and proxy server software could be loaded onto this server to protect those who submit ideas to the websites and blogs from retribution from the regime. This software helps provide anonymity to users and authors.

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<sup>179</sup> Sadegh Shojaii, “The Universities are Alive,” gozaar.org, June 11, 2010, <http://www.gozaar.org/english/articles-en/The-Universities-are-Alive.html> (accessed August 2, 2010).

<sup>180</sup> Shojaii, “The Universities are Alive.”

<sup>181</sup> Shojaii, “The Universities are Alive.”

<sup>182</sup> Shojaii, “The Universities are Alive.”

Green Movement TV could promote discussion about the regime in the more rural areas where Internet access does not exist and word-of-mouth communication is dominant. Satellite television transmitters could be leased to broadcast pro-Green Movement advertisements, discussions, and messages to Iranian citizens who do not have Internet access. Many Iranians—the poor and rural—do not have computers but do have satellite TV. The poor and rural populations tend to support the regime, so the Green Movement needs to be able to reach out to these groups. A TV station could reach these groups and could inform them of the problems with the Iranian regime, the effects on the rest of the Iranian population, and why their support is needed.

### **3. Increase Regime’s Cost to Survive**

The United States, through supporting Green Movement’s communications abilities, can weaken the Iranian regime by increasing its cost to survive. The attention and effort that the regime must give to countering the Green Movement has created a huge burden on the regime.<sup>183</sup> Over time, this burden may weaken the regime enough where they are no longer strong enough to resist the Green Movement’s demands for reform. In order to repress a massive movement of millions of people involved, the regime has expended “public funds on its repressive operations instead of plundering them for its own benefit.”<sup>184</sup> U.S.. IO and PSYOP support to the Green Movement can supply messaging to inundate Iran with information that speaks negatively about the regime. Besides electronic media support, the United States can provide thousands of mass-produced leaflets, posters, and banners that can be covertly plastered around urban centers by Green Movement supporters. This type of media support that attacks the regime could have messages that: 1) highlight the departure of people who have left government positions, 2) highlight the internal struggles within the regime and its fragility, 3) highlight the differences in the ruling class, 4) highlight that violations of

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<sup>183</sup> Majid Mohammadi, “Ten Green Movement Strategies to Make the Islamic Regime Yield,” gozaar.org, June 14, 2010, <http://www.gozaar.org/english/articles-en/Ten-Green-Movement-Strategies-to-Make-the-Islamic-Regime-Yield.html> (accessed August 2, 2010).

<sup>184</sup> Mohammadi, “Ten Green Movement Strategies.”

human rights in Iran are beyond that of other countries,<sup>185</sup> 5) discredit IRGC-connected firms for their lead role in human rights abuses,<sup>186</sup> and 6) highlight that the friends of the regime are the most authoritarian (Russia, China, and North Korea), most corrupt (Zimbabwe and Syria), and most violent (Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas).<sup>187</sup>

#### **4. Provide Information That Was Censored from the Iranian People**

The United States can provide Green Movement supporters information about the Iranian regime's harmful practices with supporting evidence that has not been censored by the regime. The Iranian regime censors information from Iranian citizens. For many Iranians, especially in areas outside the major urban centers, the stories about human rights violations and how poorly the regime is doing are just that—stories without proof. By providing evidence to support stories about the regime, the Green Movement may win the support of Iranians who doubt how repressive and harmful the regime has been.

#### **5. Fund Iranian Diaspora**

The enormous resource of the Iranian diaspora has not been completely mobilized.<sup>188</sup> “Across the world there are around 3 million successful Iranians, the majority of whom want democracy. Without their help, it is not possible to build a democratic Iran.”<sup>189</sup> The Iranian diaspora are important for two reasons. First, they provide a vital link to friends and family that still live in Iran. Secondly, they can work from within their current countries of residence to create a larger coalition to mobilize forces better. The Iranian diaspora can promote the work of journalists and civil society activists who have been expelled from Iran, they can pass uncensored information to

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<sup>185</sup> Mohammadi, “Ten Green Movement Strategies.”

<sup>186</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction,” 16.

<sup>187</sup> Mohammadi, “Ten Green Movement Strategies.”

<sup>188</sup> Efran Mohammadi, “Abbas Milani: Future of the Green Movement is Bright,” gozaar.org, June 11, 2010, <http://www.gozaar.org/english/interview-en/Abbas-Milani-Future-of-the-Green-Movement-is-Bright.html> (accessed August 2, 2010).

<sup>189</sup> Mohammadi, “Abbas Milani.”

friends and family in Iran, and the diaspora can organize rallies to promote the Green Movement's causes which could attract the attention of governments to put additional political pressure on the Iranian regime.

## **6. Coordinate Media Distribution Programs**

The United States can help the Green Movement by analyzing areas within Iran where support is weak, and then create a plan to distribute media and information about the Green Movement and the negative aspects of the regime to those areas. Due to the Green Movement's decentralized nature—no hierarchal organizational structure with divisions to address specific functions—an outside coordination group can help to identify weaknesses and address them. One of these weaknesses is getting information to rural areas. One means to get information out is to mass-produce DVDs or informational flyers that can be delivered to these areas. The United States can produce this media, identify where it needs to go, and then coordinate a plan for Green Movement supporters to enact the distribution plan.

## **7. Encourage Clerics to Support Green Movement Through Covert Funding**

Because the Iranian regime has accused the Green Movement of “irreligiosity [sic] and dependence on foreigners,” the presence of the clergy in the movement is vital.<sup>190</sup> Clerics who support the Green Movement would give it credibility by proving that Iranians can be both good Muslims and support the Green Movement. Clerics, seen as having intentions driven by the Islamic faith and not linked to Western ideals, would counter the regime's claim that the Green Movement's reformist ideas would corrupt Islamic values and the correct way to live. The Green Movement claims to have the support of many clerics, although they are afraid to show their support.<sup>191</sup> Unfortunately for the Green Movement, only the fundamentalist clerics are vocal; however, “the actions

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<sup>190</sup> Mohammad J. Akbarien, “The Protest Movement and Religious Seminaries: Green or Black?,” gozaar.org, June 14, 2010, <http://www.gozaar.org/english/articles-en/The-Protest-Movement-and-Religious-Seminaries-Green-or-Black.html> (accessed August 2, 2010).

<sup>191</sup> Akbarien, “The Protest Movement.”

and views of a few biased fundamentalist clerics do not reflect the views of all clerics and the maraje-e taqlid [sources of religious emulation].”<sup>192</sup> The inability for the clerics to voice their support is based on two things. First, the tradition of taqiyya (concealing one’s beliefs) dominates the seminaries and has priority over the virtue of courage. For this reason there is the impression that the seminarians do not support the Green Movement.<sup>193</sup> “But the innermost beliefs of the majority of the seminarians are at odds with their silent or masked appearance.”<sup>194</sup> The second problem is that clerics get their funding from the Center of Administration which is controlled by the Office of the Supreme Leader. If nonconformist clerics fail to heed warning from the center, “this center discontinues their funding or refers them to the Special Court for Clerics, where they will face punishment.”<sup>195</sup> The United States can help nonconformist clerics by covertly funneling money to them through “donations” by Green Movement supporters. This solution will not prevent the fear of potential punishment, but at least the clerics will be less dependent on financial support from the state. External funding will allow clerics to not have to conceal their beliefs for fear of losing funding to support their mosque and supported programs.

#### **D. CONSEQUENCES OF UNITED STATES INTERVENTION**

There are several consequences for the United States if it chooses to intervene in Iran’s domestic affairs. If support was overt or if covert support was discovered, the United States would lose credibility because the United States would be breaking an international treaty without causation. The 1981 Algiers Accords was a promise by the United States not to intervene in Iran’s domestic affairs. Breaking this agreement with Iran could affect the United States’ credibility amongst the international community concerning future foreign policy. Another political issue is that unilateral operations, in the event that the United States intervenes covertly, would be counter to the U.S.. multilateral policy in dealing with Middle Eastern affairs. The United States desires to

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<sup>192</sup> Akbarien, “The Protest Movement.”

<sup>193</sup> Akbarien, “The Protest Movement.”

<sup>194</sup> Akbarien, “The Protest Movement.”

<sup>195</sup> Akbarien, “The Protest Movement.”

have the support and the weight of other countries behind Middle Eastern foreign policy. A multilateral approach counters the Middle East's perception that intervention is totally in the United State's self-interests. In addition, the United States would likely lose the support of Russia, China, and India in enforcing economic sanctions against Iran.

#### **E. INTERVENTION USING SOFT POWER**

Soft power is the best way to affect Iranian regime reform. Soft power is the power of attraction that is associated with ideas, cultures, and policies.<sup>196</sup> Soft power involves the use of foreign and domestic policies, words, actions, and images in a sustained effort to influence and change the environment of the targeted country or population. Soft power can be more effective than military might. Khamenei stated in 2003:

More than Iran's enemies need artillery, guns and so forth, they need to spread cultural values that lead to moral corruption. They have said this many times. I recently read in the news that a senior official in an important American political center said: 'Instead of bombs, send them miniskirts.' He is right. If they arouse sexual desires in any given country, if they spread unrestrained mixing of men and women, and if they lead youth to behavior to which they are naturally inclined by instincts, there will no longer be any need for artillery and guns against that nation.<sup>197</sup>

This statement indicates that Iranian conservatives are concerned about the influence of soft power. The most effective way of exploiting the Iranian regime's concern about soft power is through influence and information operations. Through influence and information operations, the Green Movement can challenge the regime's propaganda and ideology.

Soft power includes influence operations such as Information Operations (IO), including Psychological Operations and Computer Network Operations. Aspects of Unconventional Warfare can also be used to affect changes without the use of force. Influence operations are the employment of capabilities to affect behaviors, protect

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<sup>196</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books Group, 2004), X.

<sup>197</sup> Karim Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, 2008), 17.

operations, communicate commander's intent, and project accurate information to achieve desired effects across the cognitive domain.<sup>198</sup> IO is the integrated employment of the core capabilities of Psychological Operation and Computer Network Operations in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities to influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making.<sup>199</sup> IO is a medium through which soft power can be projected. Examples of IO capabilities that currently exist and being implemented towards Iran are Radio Farda and Voice of America Persian Television. These networks broadcast in Persian and claim to reach 70 percent of the Iranian population under the age of 30.<sup>200</sup> IO concepts used to support the Green Movement must not only be responsive to changes, but also use the same standards and techniques employed by regionally respected networks like the BBC and Al Jazeera. Enabling access to social networking websites can enhance the IO effort. Social networking sites are very popular in Iran and there are an estimated 46,000 bloggers.<sup>201</sup> Social networking websites can be used to support influencing operations and IO by using sites such as Twitter, Facebook, My Space, and blogs. These sites can be used by elements inside and outside Iran to communicate, rally support, and pass information in support of the Green Movement. The ability to use these sites, even when the regime attempts to block them, was demonstrated during the post-election protests and subsequent regime crack down in Tehran in June 2009.

Psychological Operations (PSYOP) are planned operations used to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.<sup>202</sup> A successful example related to Iran is when

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<sup>198</sup> "Joint Publication 3-13," fas.org, [http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3\\_13.pdf](http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3_13.pdf) (accessed September 9, 2010).

<sup>199</sup> "Joint Publication 3-13," fas.org, [http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3\\_13.pdf](http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3_13.pdf) (accessed September 9, 2010).

<sup>200</sup> Hansjoerg Biener, "The Arrival of Radio Farda," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal*, Vol.7, No. 1, (March 2003): 17.

<sup>201</sup> "The Price Paid for Blogging Iran," BBC.co.uk, February 21, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4283231.stm> (accessed September 9, 2010).

<sup>202</sup> "Joint Publication 3-13," fas.org, [http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3\\_13.pdf](http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3_13.pdf) (accessed September 9, 2010).

Khomeni distributed audio tapes prior to the 1979 revolution to gain support. A modern version of this would be the distribution of DVD's containing government documents and television and radio broadcasts of speeches that target the regime's corruption, human rights violations, regime fissures, IRGC domination, and economic failures of the regime. Documentaries that highlight events such as the death of Neda Agha Soltan during the 2009 protests and pictures and videos that could expose inhumane treatment of political prisoners are examples of PSYOP that could be employed.

Computer Network Operations (CNO) are comprised of computer network attack, computer network defense, and related computer network exploitation enabling operations.<sup>203</sup> CNO operations can be employed to target official regime websites through hacking, defacements, and Denial of Service or Distributed Denial of Service attacks. Examples of this are the use of government systems or patriotic hackers like the cyber attacks on Georgia in 2008 and Estonia in 2003. The Russian government was suspected, but no direct connections could be established in those attacks. However, there are dangers in conducting CNO. Pro-regime hacking communities could target United States networks, websites, and systems. CNO can also target the regime's extensive ability to filter content from outside sources and networks. CNO can also be used to defend Green Movement networks, servers, and websites used to deliver IO and PSYOP efforts against Iranian CNO efforts. The regime employs extensive technologies to defend against network attacks and to control and censor Internet activity. Technologies such as virtual private networks and proxy servers and access to satellite-based Internet services are ways around regime efforts. CNO operations can be used to gather information from regime networks that can be used against the regime. Examples would be gaining access to internal documents that high light regime corruption, human rights abuses, regime fissures, and regime failures.

Unconventional Warfare (UW) will play an important role in implementing the elements of soft power. UW for intervention to support the Green Movement does not involve the employment of military personnel within the borders of Iran. The objectives

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<sup>203</sup> "Joint Publication 3-13," fas.org, [http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3\\_13.pdf](http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3_13.pdf) (accessed September 9, 2010).



of an UW effort would be to facilitate the training and equipping of members of the Green Movement so they can implement an information operations campaign, build capacity, and increase capability. Instead of putting boots on the ground, the engagement and training of members of the Green Movement would be done through cultural and academic exchange programs in third party countries in the region, in Europe, or in the United States. Equipment and materials could also be provided for the trained personnel to take back with them. An important aspect of the training is the ability to recruit personnel that can help develop products and messages that are effective and easily understood by the targeted audience. An intricate knowledge of Iranian society, culture, and politics will be essential to UW operators.

#### **F. WHEN SHOULD THE UNITED STATES ACT?**

The United States could assist the Green Movement immediately, or the United States can wait for Iran to turn down a good offer before the United States acts. If the Iranian regime turns down a “grand bargain”—where the United States openly agrees to not interfere with Iran’s domestic issues in exchange for Iran not obtaining a nuclear weapons capability—then it would be seen that the United States has exhausted its options in regards to Iran. The United States can continue with its sanctions on Iran, but “reformers generally agree that sanctions to date have not been useful.”<sup>204</sup> By waiting for the Iranian regime to deny any last possibility of negotiations with the United States, the idea of allocating funds to assist the Green Movement may be seen as a last option, thus being easier for Congress to swallow.

#### **G. SCOPE OF UNITED STATES INTERVENTION**

The scope of intervention—overt or covert—for this thesis is narrowed to go beyond the current policies of diplomatic engagement and persuasion, but not to the extreme of full military engagement. Diplomatic options—foreign policy, sanctions, etc.—is left outside this thesis for other political analysts to determine. On the other extreme, full military engagement is widely viewed to be used as a last resort, if at all. A

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<sup>204</sup> Clawson, “Much Traction for Measured Steps,” 16.

few negatives of this option are: lack of U.S.. domestic support, vehement opposition for Europe, Russia, and China, the requirement of massive troop movements that would divert assets away from Afghanistan and Iraq, and it would take years to establish a stable government.<sup>205</sup>

The scope of intervention should be a “middle line” option that supplements current U.S.. policy towards Iran. The United States should constrain intervention by: 1) having no U.S.. military forces or advisors *in* Iran, 2) not being involved in any kinetic action or supplying weapons, and 3) using only soft power to enhance the Green Movement. The U.S.. objective is to enhance the Green Movement in order to affect Iranian regime reform to influence future Iranian policy.

## **H. COA #1: NO ACTION**

### **1. Concept of the Operation**

The United States continues its current policies and approaches towards Iran. The administration continues diplomatic efforts through persuasion, engagement, and economic sanctions. The United Nations will continue to be used as a multilateral effort to influence the Iranian regime’s behavior.

### **2. Opportunities**

The United States will continue diplomatic efforts on issues such as nuclear weapons and human rights. In return for Iran to not pursue a nuclear weapons capability, the United States could offer incentives such as membership in the World Trade Organization, the easing or elimination of economic sanctions, investment in infrastructure, and the recognition of Iran as a regional power. The United States, either unilaterally or with the United Nations, could seek to add or increase the severity of existing sanctions in order to force them to the negotiating table.

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<sup>205</sup> Kenneth Pollack et al., *Which Path to Persia?: Options for a New American Strategy toward Iran* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2009), 93, 97.

### **3. Consequences**

The most severe consequence of no action is that Iran will most likely remain an authoritarian regime that continues to pursue a nuclear weapons capability. A nuclear weapons capable Iran may ignite an arms race in the Middle East to counter the threat of an Iranian hegemony. Diplomatic relations with Iran will continue to remain poor and Iran will continue to disrupt the current negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization through Hamas, Hezbollah, and its Quds force. Human rights violations will continue as harsher economic sanctions take effect and regime paranoia increases. Without U.S.. intervention, the Green Movement is more likely to fail or take longer to affect change. The United States is less likely to strike an agreement on the nuclear weapons issue with the current authoritarian regime than it would with a more reform-minded regime that is friendlier to globalization and the West.

## **I. COA #2: COVERT INTERVENTION**

### **1. Concept of the Operation**

The United States government unilaterally employs soft power using IO, PSYOP, CNO and UW in support of the Green Movement in a manner that hides U.S.. support. The intent of the support is to increase the effectiveness of the Green Movement, counter regime propaganda and ideology, and exploit internal fissures within the regime in order to affect regime reform. Covert intervention would be a coordinated effort that continues to utilize diplomacy but also involves military and interagency cooperation. Covert support includes the development of strategy, IO, actions and themes, and funding for the Green Movement to use against the Iranian regime. Covert intervention would utilize elements of influencing operations and UW. Covert intervention would be a unilateral effort by the United States in order to maintain secrecy. A multilateral effort would run the risk of discovery and would enable the regime to discredit the Green Movement. Any direct support from U.S.. personnel would occur in border regions outside of Iran. When necessary, Green Movement supporters would cross the border to neighboring countries to receive training and materials, and then return to Iran to disseminate the materials.

## **2. Opportunities**

Covert support can increase the effectiveness of the Green Movement, counter regime propaganda and ideology, and exploit internal fissures within the regime in order to affect regime reform without the regime being able to use U.S.. support against the Green Movement. Any of the opportunities outlined earlier in this chapter can be used in covert intervention. It will be critical in the IO and UW efforts to avoid U.S.. government signature in format, origin, or support. The Iranian diaspora can be heavily used to gain access into Iran. The United States can still employ and improve some overt assets such as Radio Farda and Voice of America Persian Television. Improvements in these capabilities can distract the regime from discovering covert efforts.

PSYOP can be used to expose instances of corruption, economic problems, regime abuses, and fractures among regime elites. A campaign can also be designed to highlight that a nuclear weapons program undermines Iranian security and relations with the West and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations. This can be done through social networking sites, pro-Green Movement websites, and the infiltration of DVDs and printed material through smuggling routes or hidden in items brought in by returning Iranians or normal imports. Examples would be to hide Green Movement propaganda, framed messages, and documents harmful to the regime on DVD's via technologies such as stenography.

Patriotic hackers can be employed to conduct CNO to disrupt regime websites and government e-services. Denial of Service attacks could be launched using servers and computers located in multiple countries while avoiding a direct link to any U.S.. government or personal involvement. Green Movement supporters can be trained to employ social engineering tools to gain access to government computers and servers in order to extract information about regime activities. This information can then be used in PSYOP efforts and spread through social networking tools.

## **3. Consequences**

The most significant consequence of covert U.S.. intervention is that, if discovered, it could invoke a regime crackdown using IRGC, Basij and other security forces in a violent effort to maintain power. The regime could increase its authoritarianism, resulting in increases in human rights abuses, lethal force against activists, and arrests of Green Movement leaders, regime officials, clerics, or Iranian elites who indicate support for the movement. Signs of U.S.. intervention could cause some Iranians to rally around the regime or, conversely, threaten IRGC power and influence. A threat to IRGC power could cause them to act boldly by cracking down, thus creating a more authoritarian military state. The consequence of improperly framed messages could delegitimize the Green Movement or cause the Green Movement to overplay its hand in anticipation of more U.S.. support. Intervention could accelerate regime efforts to build nuclear weapons and delivery systems. Iran could retaliate through proxies such as Hamas and Hezbollah against Israel, attack European and United States interests in the region, or increase support for the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Intervention could also trigger the Iranian regime to close the Strait of Hormuz, which would disrupt shipments of oil and cause a global spike in oil prices.

## **J. COA #3: OVERT SUPPORT**

### **1. Concept of the Operation**

The U.S.. government employs soft power using IO, PSYOP, CNO, and UW in support of the Green Movement in a manner that does not attempt to hide U.S.. support. The intent of the support is to increase the effectiveness of the Green Movement, counter regime propaganda and ideology, and exploit internal fissures within the regime in order to affect regime reform. This must be a coordinated effort that involves the military and interagency cooperation, coordination, and de-confliction. Overt support includes the development of strategy, IO, actions and themes, and funding for the Green Movement to use against the Iranian regime. The United States must not implicate GCC nations and other Western nations. This could cause retaliation against other Western nations and domestic backlash GCC governments if these countries are seen as cooperating with

U.S.. meddling in Iranian domestic affairs. As with covert intervention, overt intervention would not involve U.S.. personnel in Iran.

## **2. Opportunities**

Overt intervention allows the United States its boldest and most aggressive option in supporting the Green Movement's efforts to counter the regime's rhetoric, ideology, proclaimed capabilities, and propaganda. There is also the opportunity to take advantage of the Iranian people's desire for closer ties with the West. PSYOP could be used to expose instances of corruption, economic problems, regime abuses, and fractures among regime elites. A campaign can also be designed to highlight that a nuclear weapons program undermines Iranian security and relations with the West and GCC nations.

CNO can provide an opportunity to disrupt or defeat Iranian censorship efforts and open up access to more sources of external information. CNO would facilitate greater communication between Green Movement members, the Iranian diaspora, and others interested in learning more about regime reform. Providing equipment and software to support the use of virtual private networks, proxy servers and satellite-based Internet services are examples of ways to bypass the regime's control and censorship of the Internet. The use of CNO can also be used to extract information from regime networks to discredit the regime, highlight corruption, and identify abuses.

PSYOP can improve the messaging in existing assets such as radio and television broadcasts into Iran. These assets currently exist but can be expanded to satellite-based services. Material that exposes regime abuses and crimes can be provided to regionally respected media outlets such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabia for broadcast in legitimate news stories. The Internet is also an invaluable tool in getting messages and materials into the country and in the hands of Green Movement supporters.

## **3. Consequences**

The consequences of overt action are the same as in covert intervention. In addition, the employment of CNO can be viewed as an attack on the regime and its sovereignty by the United States if done overtly, resulting in the regime employing its own CNO capabilities against United States and allied networks as retaliation. This could also result in retaliation via proxy assets, such as Hezbollah, in the region.

## **V. GAME THEORY ANALYSIS OF U.S.. INTERVENTION OPTIONS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Game theory looks at behaviors of rational players to determine which strategies should be selected. Game theory attempts to mathematically capture behavior in strategic situations, or games, in which an individual's success in making choices depends on the choices of others.<sup>206</sup> Game theory was chosen as a tool in this thesis because game theory outcomes very often reflect real-life outcomes. When game theory was applied to the question of whether the United States should intervene in Iranian affairs and how, it was determined that the United States should covertly support the Green Movement. There are several reasons for this outcome. First, U.S.. intervention is necessary in order for the Green Movement to succeed in the near future. Without U.S.. intervention, the Green Movement will either take years to affect regime reform or the Green Movement may never succeed. Another factor in why game theory determined that U.S.. intervention is preferable is because, if the Green Movement succeeds in regime reform in part because of U.S.. assistance, the United States will likely have more influence in the reform-minded Iranian regime. This influence can help the United States in accomplishing its national security interests.

### **B. GAME THEORY MATRIX, VARIABLES, AND PREFERENCE VALUES**

A 3x3 game theory matrix was used because the United States has three options for intervention with three forms of regime opposition. Figure 6 shows a 3x3 game theory matrix where the United States options listed across the top of the matrix and the options for regime reform are listed on the left.

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<sup>206</sup> Roger B. Myerson, *Game Theory: Analysis of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 1.

	No Action		Covert		Overt
GM	X <sub>1</sub> ,Y <sub>1</sub>		X <sub>2</sub> ,Y <sub>2</sub>		X <sub>3</sub> ,Y <sub>3</sub>
Coup	X <sub>4</sub> ,Y <sub>4</sub>		X <sub>5</sub> ,Y <sub>5</sub>		X <sub>6</sub> ,Y <sub>6</sub>
Ethnic	X <sub>7</sub> ,Y <sub>7</sub>		X <sub>8</sub> ,Y <sub>8</sub>		X <sub>9</sub> ,Y <sub>9</sub>

Figure 6. 3x3 Game Theory Matrix without Preference Values

We assumed that the United States has only three courses of action for this game: no action, covert support to affect regime reform, or overt support to affect regime reform. No action is defined where the United States continues diplomatic efforts through persuasion, engagement, and economic sanctions. Covert support is defined as unilateral employment of military soft power by the United States using IO, PSYOP, CNO, and UW in support of an opposition group in a manner that hides U.S.. support. Overt support is defined as unilateral employment of military soft power by the United States using IO, PSYOP, CNO, and UW in support of an opposition group in a manner that does not attempt to hide U.S.. support. The three United States options are evaluated against three possible forms of Iranian regime opposition that could affect regime reform.

We assume that the three forms of Iranian regime opposition are the Green Movement (GM), a coup, and an ethnic group uprising in Iran. The Green Movement form of regime opposition represents the current Green Movement in Iran and is discussed in detail in Chapter III. A coup is defined as the sudden, extra-legal deposition of a government. In Iran, a coup would likely come from IRGC leadership seeking to take control over the government. The ethnic group form of regime opposition is defined as one or several ethnic groups in Iran, such as the Kurds, Azeries, or Baluchis, in an effort to affect regime reform.

The next step in game theory analysis is to use Utility Theory to help assign preference values to each of the United States options and forms of regime opposition. In each of the nine options for U.S.. intervention an ordinal ranking based on a scale of 0-10 is inserted for each **X** and **Y** position. On the scale, 10 indicates the best possible option and 0 indicates the worst possible option. The **X** position represents the preference



ranking for the United States possible course of action (No Action, Covert, and Overt) when assessed against each of the three forms of regime opposition. These assessments were made based on the PMESII analysis of the Iranian regime's strengths and weaknesses discussed in Chapter II, the analysis of the Green Movement in Chapter III, and the course of action analysis on Chapter IV. The impacts of the three United States courses of action on chances of success were also taken into account.

Our preference values were also based on several key assumptions. The assumptions that we made are:

- The Green Movement, coup, and ethnic uprising are the three most likely forms of regime change.
- A coup or ethnic uprising will not result in significant regime reform.
- The United States desires greater influence with the Iranian government.
- The Green Movement offers the best means to promote human rights and civil liberties.
- A coup would result in a more authoritarian regime.
- An ethnic uprising would lead to an ethnically fractured Iran resulting in instability.
- Any link to the U.S.. government is detrimental to the credibility of any form of regime change.
- The United States increases its opportunity for influence in a new Iranian regime by supporting an opposition movement.
- Covert support would increase effectiveness of forms of regime change and protect their credibility.
- The United States prefers to support the Green Movement versus support of a coup or ethnic uprising.
- Green Movement leaders would be more open to discussion with the United States than other leaders of opposition movements.

It was assessed that covert action was the preferred course of action when combined with the Green Movement. However, covert action was not always seen as the preferred course of action. No action by the United States was seen as preferred when the source of Iranian regime opposition was either a coup or ethnic uprising. No action has the least risk to the United States or opposition groups; however, the United States does not increase its likelihood of gaining any ability to influence the opposition group if its leadership comes into positions of power. Overt support is never preferred. If U.S.. support is given, it must be covert to protect the credibility of the form of regime opposition. Covert support for the Green Movement was ranked high (9 out of 10)

because of the higher likelihood of the Green Movement being successful when compared to other forms of regime opposition, and the potential influence the United States could have with Green Movement leadership who come into positions of power.

The **Y** position represents the preference ranking of the three forms of regime opposition (GM, coup, ethnic) when assessed against one of the three United States courses of action. The analysis of the Green Movement in Chapter III and the opportunities and consequences of the courses of action analyzed in Chapter IV were used to determine the preference ranking. The likelihood of success for each form of regime opposition and the U.S.. impact on credibility were important factors determining the preference ranking.

The Green Movement received higher preference values because of its demonstrated ability to mobilize a large number of the Iranian population, its ability to frame messages that appeal to many diverse groups, and its political opportunities through its associations with respected political and religious leaders. The preference values for the other forms of regime opposition are low because our assessment indicates that a coup is possible but unlikely, and an ethnic uprising is not likely at all. In addition, those who would rally a coup or ethnic uprising are least likely to accept any form of U.S.. support.

### **C. GAME THEORY RESULTS**

In Figure 7, the preference values for each **X** and **Y** variable have been inserted into the 3x3 payoff game theory matrix. Game theory analysis can determine if there is a pure strategy—one single solution—or if a mixed strategy exists. The game was analyzed to determine the best course of action for each player. The analysis started with a movement diagram. For movement diagrams in non-zero sum games, the row player wants to maximize payoffs, so they would prefer the highest payoff in each column. The arrows in the columns indicate the highest payoff for the row player. Similarly for the column player, they want to maximize their payoffs, so they would prefer the highest payoff in each row. An arrow is drawn to the highest payoff in that row. The arrows in the rows indicate the highest payoff for the column player. If all arrows point inward for a cell in the payoff matrix, that point will be a pure Nash Equilibrium.

The movement diagram arrows point to the values that maximize the preferences for the players. For example, in the first column, upper left section, 8 is greater than 3 so the arrow points up from 3 to 8. This indicates that 8 is the preferred value. The vertical arrows correspond to the X positions and the horizontal arrows correspond to the Y positions.

	No Action		Covert		Overt
<b>GM</b>	8,6	→	<b>9,8</b>	←	4,1
	↑		↑		↑
<b>Coup</b>	3,3	→	2,4	←	1,2
	↑		↑		↑
<b>Ethnic</b>	1,1	→	0,1	←	0,0
<b>Nash Equilibrium Pure Strategy Solution at (9,8)</b>					

Figure 7. 3x3 Game Theory Matrix with Preference Values and Movement Diagram

By analyzing Figure 7, a Nash Equilibrium pure strategy was found at (9,8), which translates to U.S.. covert support for the Green Movement. A Nash Equilibrium pure strategy indicates the dominant strategy where, if the scenario where the United States and other players chose different intervention options over multiple iterations, the results would attempt to achieve equilibrium at this solution. If any player tries to deviate from this point, neither player can improve their payoff. Thus, the Nash Equilibrium represents the optimized solution for all players. In addition, because it is a pure strategy, this single Nash Equilibrium solution indicates that there is only a single solution versus a mixed strategy.

Mixed strategies are where a combination of strategies yields the most favorable results. An example of a mixed strategy finding would be for Player A to conduct Option Y 30 percent of the time and conduct Option Z 70 percent of the time. However, the findings in this thesis determined a “pure strategy” where the United States should only support the Green Movement and that the United States should only support the Green Movement covertly. In other words, the United States should not try to support other forms of Iranian regime opposition besides the Green Movement; and, the United States should intervene, but never do so overtly.

In contrast, when the game was played using linear programming the results yielded a solution at (3,3), where a coup occurs and the United States does not intervene at all. Although linear programming often results in a mixed strategy solution, the result was a mixed strategy pure strategy solution. The linear programming solution indicates that the United States should choose to not intervene 100 percent of the time and the best form of regime opposition is a coup 100 percent of the time. The results derived from linear programming show the best solution for one player by limiting the options of the other players. However, this solution may not be the best option for either player. Both players are always looking to do better. In this game with the linear programming solution of (3,3), the intervention option of the United States could be better (no intervention has the preference ranking of 3 on a scale of 10) and the form of regime opposition could be better (coup has the preference ranking of 3 on a scale of 10).

#### **D. TWO SOLUTIONS: WHICH IS BETTER?**

Game theory analysis has resulted in two different solutions. The Nash Equilibrium solution indicates that the United States should covertly support the Green Movement. The linear programming solution indicates that the United States should not intervene and hope a coup affects regime reform. So, which one is the best solution?

The best solution is the Nash Equilibrium solution where the United States covertly supports the Green Movement. There are several reasons to support this conclusion. First, the Nash Equilibrium solution is supported by mathematical analysis for game theory. The Nash Equilibrium solution at (9,8) is the Pareto Optimal solution. The Pareto Optimal solution is mathematically the most efficient, or best, solution for all players.<sup>207</sup> Mathematically better solutions tend to play out the same way in real life. Typically, the best solution mathematically has a higher probability of likelihood in real life. Second, the Nash Equilibrium solution is supported by the research in this thesis. Third, the linear programming solution is less desirable because all players are going to seek a better solution. Future changes to the initial solution may be less desirable to U.S.. interests. Fourth, a coup in Iran does not support U.S.. national interests. A coup would

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<sup>207</sup> Mikhael Shor, "Dictionary of Game Theory Terms: Pareto Optimal," [www.GameTheory .net](http://www.gametheory.net), <http://www.gametheory.net/dictionary/ParetoOptimal.html> (accessed October 28, 2010).

not necessarily result in an infusion of reformist thought, openness to Western relations, stemming support for terrorist organizations, decreased human rights violations, increased civil liberties, or preventing the acquirement of a nuclear weapons capability. Finally, a coup is plausible but unlikely to occur. And, even if a coup does occur, it is not a solution the United States wants to see in Iran. A coup could destabilize a relatively stable Iran, and, as noted previously, may not support U.S.. national interests. For these reasons the United States should not wait for a coup to occur on its own, but chose to intervene covertly in support of the Green Movement using instruments of soft power.

Game Theory results can vary widely due to assigned preference values. The findings of this game theory analysis were largely determined by the preference values that were assigned to the variables. The preference values given to the variables are subjective; however, the values reflect careful consideration and the weighing of many factors. Considerations include questions such as: What option of intervention (or not) is the most beneficial for the United States? How harmful is overt U.S.. support to the legitimacy of the Iranian regime's opponent? What form of opposition allows for future U.S.. influence in Iranian affairs? Changing preference values can change the outcome of the game, but the values assigned in this game are pragmatic and reflect numerous perspectives.

Another consideration in this game theory analysis was choosing the forms of regime opposition. The forms of opposition were limited to the three we felt were the likeliest threats to the current Iranian regime: the Green Movement, an internal coup, and an event where an ethnic group attempts to gain control over the government. The game theory analysis indicates that the Green Movement is the dominant threat to the Iranian regime while the other threats to the regime are less substantial.

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## VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis is to provide U.S.. policymakers with an analysis of the opportunities and consequences resulting from intervention in Iran. The intent is to assist policymakers in determining whether the United States should intervene in Iran and support Iranian regime reform. Some political observers say that the movement in Iran is strong enough, and will eventually affect change in Iran. Other political observers claim that, although the current Iranian regime is flawed and weak in some areas, it is still quite strong and is capable of putting down any rebellion. There are U.S.. policymakers that feel we need to act now to help determine Iran's future. Senators John Cornyn (R-TX) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) have introduced the Iran Democratic Transition Act of 2010. This act would provide non-military assistance to the opposition movement and would establish a special envoy for democracy and human rights. The goal of the act is to “deny the current regime the ability to oppress its own people and interfere with international affairs of its neighbors (including Iraq and Afghanistan), finance or support terrorist organizations, and develop weapons of mass destruction and the associated delivery systems.”<sup>208</sup>

### A. THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING INTERVENTION

As outlined in Chapter I, Iranian regime reform falls within the U.S. national interests, but should the U.S.. intervene? The answer to this question is ultimately to be decided by U.S.. policymakers. The analysis conducted in this thesis explored four supporting questions that need to be addressed before policymakers decide whether or not to intervene in Iran. First, are there sufficient weaknesses in the Iranian regime that can be exploited to affect regime reform? The analysis completed in Chapter II shows that while the regime remains strong, it has enough weaknesses in its political structure, military capabilities, economic sectors, social conditions, information capabilities, and state infrastructure that can be exploited to support regime reform if enough pressure is

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<sup>208</sup> Helle C. Dale, and James Phillips, “Support for Iran’s Green Revolution Gains Traction in the Senate,” *The Heritage Foundation* 2806 (February 17, 2010): 1–2.

brought to bear. Second, what are the options available that can affect regime reform? In Chapter III, the strengths and weaknesses of the Green Movement were examined through Social Movement Theory. The Green Movement was assessed as the most viable option for affecting regime reform due to its demonstrated ability to effectively frame messages, mobilize large groups of Iranians and existing political and religious elite connections. Third, if there is a viable opposition movement, what are the U.S. options for affecting regime reform and the associated opportunities and consequences? In Chapter IV, an analysis of U.S. options and the associated U.S., regional, and Iranian domestic opportunities and consequences were examined for U.S. policy makers. The three options assessed were no action, covert support, and overt support for regime reform, each with their own opportunities and consequences. Finally, what course of action should the U.S. choose? In Chapter V, supported by the analysis in Chapters II-IV, game theory was used to analyze the three U.S. options along with three options for affecting regime reform in order to determine a course of action. Through the use of game theory it was determined that U.S. covert support of the Green Movement using instruments of soft power designed to promote reform and weaken the Iranian regime would likely yield results.

## **B. POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF INTERVENTION**

It was determined in this thesis that U.S. covert intervention using instruments of soft power to promote reform and weaken the Iranian regime is necessary in order for the Green Movement to succeed. Without U.S. intervention, the Green Movement will either take years to affect regime reform or the Green Movement may never succeed. However, if U.S. policy makers decide to intervene in Iran, there are several policy implications that need to be assessed. Intervention could destabilize Iran. If the regime feels sufficiently threatened, it could increase crackdowns on Iranians suspected of being associated with the Green Movement. Certain elements, such as the IRGC, may feel threatened enough by a heightened regime reform effort that it would stage a coup in an effort to maintain an authoritarian regime. If U.S. involvement is discovered, it could result in the Iranian regime responding by deliberately increasing political and military



uncertainty in the greater Middle East. The Iranian regime could accomplish this through increased support to Hezbollah and Hamas in order to further destabilize the Middle East peace process. Iran could increase action by the IRGC's Quds force in Iraq and Afghanistan in an effort to target American forces and further thwart currently tenuous and ongoing U.S.. efforts. Iran could seek to close the Strait of Hormuz through the use of mines or anti-ship missiles, retaliate by attacking U.S.. ships and assets in the region, or accelerate its nuclear program. Actions taken by Iran could have global economic impacts by creating a spike in international oil prices. The impacts of this would be amplified by the current economic conditions in the United States and other countries around the world. An accelerated nuclear weapons program could result in other nations in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, developing their own nuclear weapons programs in order to counter any real or perceived threat from Iran's nuclear capability.

### **C. POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES OF INTERVENTION**

However, U.S.. intervention could yield positive results from the employment of soft power through covert intervention in Iran. A reform minded regime could come to power resulting in an Iranian government that is more receptive to U.S.. concerns, especially on the nuclear issue. This could also pave the way for the renewal of diplomatic relations, the easing of economic sanctions, and a friendlier regime in Tehran. A rise in reform minded political, and possibly religious, elites might not change the regime dramatically, but this could open more channels for communication between the U.S.. and Tehran, place more pressure on Khamenei to enact reforms, and establish direct or multi lateral negotiations that achieve progress on the issues of weapons of mass destruction, support for terrorist organizations, human rights issues, and cooperation in Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, this could lead to an Iran that is engaged in regional economic and security issues through the GCC and mitigate any possible conflict or arms race between Iran and Saudi Arabia over dominance in the region.

#### **D. FUTURE RESEARCH AND ISSUES NOT ADDRESSED**

Further analysis could be done on affecting regime reform through diplomatic efforts of persuasion and engagement. Future research could examine how much longer it would take to achieve U.S.. foreign policy objectives with Iran without any form of intervention. Also, future analysis could be done on the international and regional impact of an IRGC-lead coup, the impact of a failed intervention, and how the United States should engage a new reform minded regime if one comes to power. In addition, there needs to be more analysis on how to avoid overt ties between the Green Movement and the United States. Finally, the United States needs to be prepared to maximize its political opportunities in the event of a shock occurring in Iran such as the unexpected death of Ayatollah Khamenei, the sudden removal of President Ahmadinejad, or a significant event that leads to the compromise of Iranian-controlled nuclear material.

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

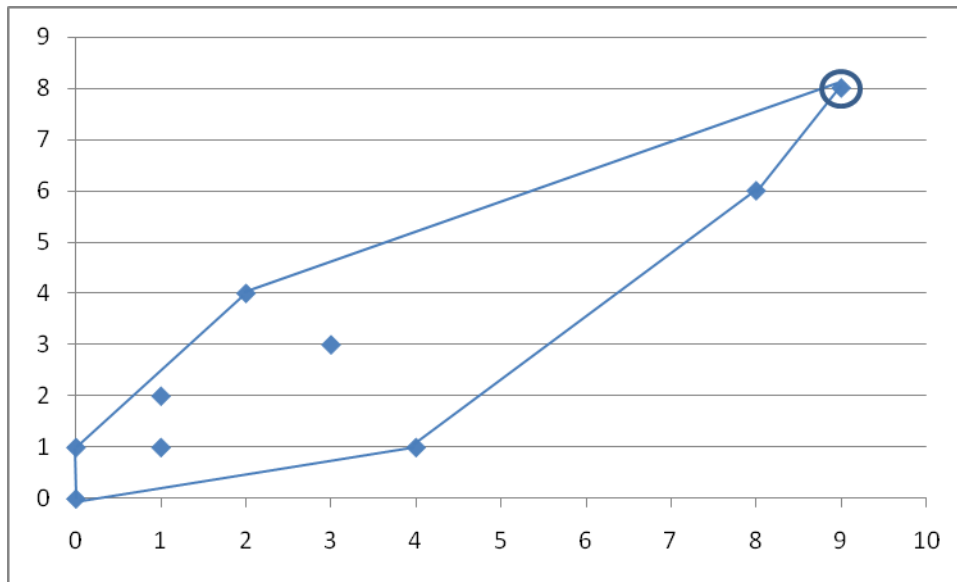
U.S.. intervention in Iran using instruments of soft power designed to promote reform and weaken the Iranian regime would likely yield results if undertaken in a covert fashion. While diplomatic efforts of engagement and persuasion and economic sanctions might achieve regime reform in time, it would likely occur after Iran developed a nuclear weapons capability. The Green Movement has shown the ability to frame messages that appeal to diverse groups of Iranians, mobilize large groups, and the potential for political opportunities through political elites. Without U.S.. support, the Green Movement is unlikely to grow and organize into a force sufficiently strong enough to make regime reform a reality. The current regime will be able to continue to suppress the Green Movement and eventually relegate it to the level of a nuisance effort. U.S.. covert support to the Green Movement is necessary for it to achieve a tipping point that pushes the current regime towards reform. If U.S.. support is not provided, the next opportunity for Iranian regime reform may not come until after Iran develops a nuclear weapons capability.

## APPENDIX: LINEAR PROGRAMMING RESULTS

3x3 Payoff Game Theory Matrix:

	No Action		Covert		Overt
GM	8,6		9,8		4,1
Coup	3,3		2,4		1,2
Ethnic	1,1		0,1		0,0

Pareto Optimal Graph:



Note: (9,8) is the Nash Equilibrium and is Pareto Optimal.

Using mixed strategies (below), the solution is (1,2), with X playing (1) 100 percent of the time and Y playing (2) 100 percent of the time.

```

max Vr
subject to
8y1+9y2+4y3-Vr >= 0
3y1+2y2+y3-Vr >= 0
y1-Vr >= 0
y1+y2+y3 = 1
Vr, Yi >= 0
End
    
```

LP OPTIMUM FOUND AT STEP 0

OBJECTIVE FUNCTION VALUE

1) 1.000000

VARIABLE	VALUE	REDUCED COST
VR	1.000000	0.000000
<b>Y1</b>	<b>1.000000</b>	0.000000
Y2	0.000000	1.000000
Y3	0.000000	1.000000
VR, YI	0.000000	0.000000

ROW	SLACK OR SURPLUS	DUAL PRICES
2)	7.000000	0.000000
3)	2.000000	0.000000
4)	0.000000	-1.000000
5)	0.000000	1.000000
6)	0.000000	0.000000

NO. ITERATIONS= 0

RANGES IN WHICH THE BASIS IS UNCHANGED:

VARIABLE	OBJ COEFFICIENT RANGES		
	CURRENT COEF	ALLOWABLE INCREASE	ALLOWABLE DECREASE
VR	1.000000	INFINITY	1.000000
Y1	0.000000	INFINITY	1.000000
Y2	0.000000	1.000000	INFINITY
Y3	0.000000	1.000000	INFINITY
VR, YI	0.000000	0.000000	INFINITY

ROW	RIGHTHAND SIDE RANGES		
	CURRENT RHS	ALLOWABLE INCREASE	ALLOWABLE DECREASE
2	0.000000	7.000000	INFINITY
3	0.000000	2.000000	INFINITY
4	0.000000	1.000000	2.000000
5	1.000000	INFINITY	1.000000
6	0.000000	0.000000	INFINITY

max Vc

subject to  
 $6X_1+3X_2+X_3-V_c \geq 0$   
 $8X_1+4X_2+X_3-V_c \geq 0$   
 $X_1+2X_2-V_c \geq 0$   
 $X_1+X_2+X_3 = 1$   
 $V_c, X_i \geq 0$   
End

LP OPTIMUM FOUND AT STEP 0

OBJECTIVE FUNCTION VALUE

1) 2.000000

VARIABLE	VALUE	REDUCED COST
VC	2.000000	0.000000
X1	0.000000	1.000000
<b>X2</b>	<b>1.000000</b>	0.000000
X3	0.000000	2.000000
VC, XI	0.000000	0.000000

ROW SLACK OR SURPLUS DUAL PRICES

2)	1.000000	0.000000
3)	2.000000	0.000000
4)	0.000000	-1.000000
5)	0.000000	2.000000
6)	0.000000	0.000000

NO. ITERATIONS= 0

RANGES IN WHICH THE BASIS IS UNCHANGED:

VARIABLE	OBJ COEFFICIENT RANGES		
	CURRENT COEF	ALLOWABLE INCREASE	ALLOWABLE DECREASE
VC	1.000000	INFINITY	1.000000
X1	0.000000	1.000000	INFINITY
X2	0.000000	INFINITY	1.000000
X3	0.000000	2.000000	INFINITY
VC, XI	0.000000	0.000000	INFINITY

RIGHTHAND SIDE RANGES

ROW	CURRENT RHS	ALLOWABLE INCREASE	ALLOWABLE DECREASE
2	0.000000	1.000000	INFINITY
3	0.000000	2.000000	INFINITY
4	0.000000	2.000000	1.000000
5	1.000000	INFINITY	1.000000
6	0.000000	0.000000	INFINITY

The linear programming solution for the decision variables, ie, the strategies to choose, were  $(x_1, x_2, x_3) = (0, 1, 0)$  and  $(y_1, y_2, y_3) = (1, 0, 0)$ . We allow the payoff entry  $(x_2, y_1)$  to be the solution form linear programming, which is the value  $(3, 3)$ .

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