

## THIS IS WHAT REVOLUTION LOOKS LIKE

Address before the International Conference on Iranian minorities,  
*hosted by* The Democratic Movement Platform of Nations in Iran, European United  
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This time, it feels different.

The street protests, the crackdown, the arrests.

The counter-protests, the pathetic claims of victory by top regime leaders.

The apparent absence of any coordinated leadership, any national figures.

This time, the people are speaking from the heart.

They might not make it to the promised land. They might get left behind, like  
Moses on top of Mount Pisgah. Those in the streets today may never live to see a free  
Iran... or perhaps they will, and it will happen sooner than anyone can imagine.

In 2009, while the crowds were larger, they thought their cause was tolerated.  
They “merely” wanted the regime to allow them to choose from among the leadership’s  
choice of presidents.

We want the green candy, not the red one, not the black one, they chanted. Didn’t  
you say we could have the green candy?

Today’s protesters are fools no more. They realize that all the candy offered by  
this brutal, corrupt regime tastes the same.

They don’t want candy. They don’t want “reform.”

They want freedom.

And that's the first big difference between today and 2009.

Today's protestors have understood there can be no saving this regime. They don't want the smiley face, the happy turban, the green candy.

Just listen to the slogans: it's "death to the dictator," not "where is my vote?"

The second big difference between today's protests and those of 2009: they are happening all over the country, not just in Tehran and a handful of big cities.

The protests began, we are told, in Mashad, a stronghold of the regime. They spread that first day to nearby Nishapour and Kashmar.

On the second day, protests erupted in Kermanshah, Sari, Ilam, and Hamadan in the west; Rasht in the north; Qom and Qazvin in the center; but also in Zahedan in Sistan va Baluchestan in the east.

On the third day, it was the explosion: Busheir, Izeh, Bandar Abbas, Shiraz, Arak, Zanjan, Malayer, Urmia, Gorgan, Khorramabad, Amol, Mashad and Tehran.

We heard reports of unscheduled aircraft flying inside Iran. Some thought regime leaders were fleeing. Now it appears that the regime was moving anti-riot troops out of their home areas.

Even basijis don't want to thump their brothers or their cousins if they can help it, especially since many of the protestors came from the same social background as the core supporters of the regime: rural and urban poor, the unemployed and underemployed, the *mostazafin*.

These were supposed to be the most loyal supporters of the Islamic regime, and here they were chanting “Death to the Dictator,” and blasting regime leaders for their corruption, for amassing huge personal fortunes with no visible signs of income, for wasting the people’s money on foreign wars when many of them had no clean water to drink at home.

This is how the revolution starts.

But most significant of all, in my view, is the fact that the protests erupted in areas of Iran that have not joined previous rounds of public discontent: Kurds, Azeris, Ahvazis, Balouchis and other Iranian minorities joined common cause for the first time with Persians and Shias.

Evil spirits who seek to confuse the issue often pit Iran’s nationalities against the Persians. They accuse this party or that party of “separatism.”

But that assumes that the current regime is Persian or Iranian nationalist. It is not.

Who can forget the response Ayatollah Khomeini gave to a reporter in January 1979 when asked what he felt about returning to Iran from exile. “*Hichi*,” Khomeini said. “Nothing.”

This is a fundamentalist, Shiite Muslim dictatorship that has little to do with “Iran.”

YOU are “Iran,” not Ayatollah Khamenei, or his Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

You the people, in all your glorious diversity, your many languages and traditions. You are the Iran everyone can be proud of.

I like to tell my friends – many of you in this room - about the American experience.

Our democracy has changed and evolved over our 242 years.

Black Americans were still slaves when we won our freedom from Britain. Women couldn't vote. The U.S. Senate did not exist. We did not have federal income tax, or even a Navy!

But we did have our founding principles. And they are enshrined in this very compact document, the Constitution of the United States of America.

It contains just 4,543 words – including the signatures! The original version was written on just four sheets of paper.

It starts off with these words: “We the People,” and enshrines two very important principles, which remain unwavering and unchanged: the rights of individuals, and the limits of government.

Many countries since 1776 have written long, flowery constitutions to disguise the tyrannical powers of government over its citizens. Our constitution, the U.S. constitution, is the only one that explicitly puts limits on government, and reserves all other rights for the people, individually and in their states.

Iranians will debate long and hard over what form of government you want to see in your country in the future.

And that is a good thing.

There is a balance between individual and group rights, and I have no doubt you will discuss that vigorously and often.

If you are a Kurd, your individual rights include the right to speak and teach your children in your own language. The same goes for Balouchis, Azeris, Ahwazis and other national groups.

This doesn't mean you are not just as Iranian as anyone else. But it does mean that Iran must respect You, the People, and guarantee your rights.

Friends in Iraqi Kurdistan, asked me some months ago what I thought about their upcoming referendum.

“If you have an independent state, and that state becomes a dictatorship, or a state run by two families, are you better off than if you are citizens of Iraq with full political and civil rights?” I said to them.

I argued that autonomy was the option minorities seek when they live in failed states. The first option is always to seek equal protection and equal opportunity under the law.

If, of course, that is possible.

Iran is clearly a failed state. And as the protestors nation-wide have shown in recent weeks, there is nothing this failed Islamic state has to offer the people of Iran.

Nothing, except its own passing.

They need to go.

And we in the West need to help the people of Iran achieve that victory.

You have seen the tweets from President Trump. You have heard the speech from our UN ambassador, Nikki Haley. For the first time, we have a U.S. government that clearly, without the slightest ambiguity or reservation, supports the people of Iran against its tyrannical government.

We are with you, the President of the United States has said.

This is no game of whispers, no British or Rasputin-style conspiracy.

He said it openly, in public. Repeatedly. “We are with you.”

Now, what does that mean?

I believe the first thing the United States can and should do is to provide unfettered Internet service to the people of Iran. You need to be able to communicate amongst yourselves and with the world, so the world can watch and the regime cannot kill in darkness.

Congress is currently discussing a new law that would require the Treasury Department to publish lists of assets belonging to the so-called Supreme Leader and top regime officials.

Ayatollah Khamenei controls a financial and industrial empire estimated to be worth \$95 billion. Ninety-five billion dollars! How did this Mullah Nasreddin, who used to travel from village to village on a donkey celebrating marriages, amass such a fortune?

And, of course, he’s not alone. Hashemi-Rafsanjani, a pistachio farmer, was said to have become the richest man in Iran. That’s a lot of pistachios! The chief of national police, General Ahmadi Moghaddam, has \$400 million tucked away in South Korea. Qalibaf, the Larijanis, Nateq-Nouri, Mohsen Rezai, Jafari, Shahroudi and so many more all have fat foreign bank accounts. How so?

So I applaud Congress for instructing Treasury to shed some light on the corruption of regime leaders.

But Treasury can do more. They should immediately remove PJAK from their list of terrorist organizations. After all, Treasury designated PJAK in February 2009 on orders from then-President Obama, as a favor to the Islamic regime in Tehran.

Obama is no longer President.

Donald Trump is President. He can and should instruct Treasury to remove PJAK just as quickly.

And the U.S. can do much more to help the people of Iran. Through international institutions and help from our friends in Europe, they can ban the travel of regime officials engaged in human rights violations. Let them get treated for their diseases in North Korea, not Germany. They can increase the diplomatic isolation of the regime, not entertain their foreign minister. They can restrict the operations of Iran Air, Mahan Air, and other regime-controlled carriers being used to support regime terrorism at home and abroad.

They can interdict Iranian ships carrying weapons to Yemen.

They smash the “land-bridge” from Iran to Syria and south Lebanon.

The United States must help you, diplomatically, politically, economically, and tactically.

There is no shame in acknowledging you need help.

America did not win our freedom against the tyrannical British king by ourselves. In our darkest hour, we had help from abroad, from the French fleet and Lafayette.

This war will not be fought with navies, or even an air force. It will be fought on the ground by armies of freedom fighters, using their brains, their voices, and their feet.

In a country where the regime has a monopoly on the tools of violence, it would be foolish to use their own weapons against them.

But let no one mistake non-violent protest for weakness.

On the contrary. Non-violence is not for sissies.

A non-violent army has citizen-privates, and platoon-leading sergeants, and company-leading lieutenants. It has a general staff, and a logistics corps.

Does this movement have a commander-in-chief?

If so, we haven't seen him. And for now at least, I believe that's an advantage.

I believe your leaders will emerge from the ground up, not the top down.

That's what makes this revolution so special, so different.

That's what gives me hope for the future of Iran.

Imagine a world without this wretched Islamic state in Iran. First, as Iranians, imagine being able to return to your country, to reunite with your families, to pursue your dreams without fear.

We all have seen what Iranians in exile can achieve overseas. Imagine the creative genius of Iranians unleashed inside your own country without brutal, corrupt leaders to steal the fruits of your labor.

Imagine holding up your Iranian passport in pride when you travel.

Imagine inviting your friends to visit your ancestral home.

Imagine planning for family reunions, for children and grand-children. All those things “normal” people do in a normal country.

But today’s Iran is not a normal country. It is not Belgium, or France, or America.

Imagine what the Middle East would look like without this regime.

Where would dictators like Bashar al-Assad, or fanatics like Hassan Nasrollah, turn for support?

Think what would happen to Iran’s immediate neighbors without the evil presence of the Quds Force or the threat from missiles made in Iran.

The Iranian regime is the world’s most pre-eminent Islamic state. Imagine what a different, better world we would all have without it

Many years ago, in the mid-1980s, I recall having dinner with Abdul Rahman Qassemlou in Paris and quizzing him on the early days of the 1979 revolution, when he was demanding autonomy for Rojhelat.

“We tried to call a council of minorities, to see if other ethnic groups would back our struggle,” he told me. “Only two of us came, and both of us were Kurds.”

The other Kurd who attended that 1979 meeting was Rahman Haj Ahmadi, then a Qassemlou ally who went on to become secretary general of PJAK.

My dear friend, when you told me that story a number of years ago, you said that if such a meeting were held today, groups from all over Iran would come.

Well, here you all are....

This is your day. Iran is your country. It’s time for you to take it back.