PIOUS POPULIST
Understanding the rise of Iran's president
Abbas Milani

Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who won a surprise election victory in 2005, has descended into infamy in the United States as a dangerous demagogue and an anti-Semite. Ahmadinejad must be taken seriously, about oil supplies in the region, regional oil prices, and political provocations. Wherever he speaks and whenever he addresses, Ahmadinejad is always communicating with a domestic audience of millions of citizens in Iran, as well as with the rest of the Muslim world. He knows his audience well and, while he may convey an air of clumsy haphazardness, his discourse and demeanor express a meticulous craftsmanship, polished and virtuoso messages of pious populism. He is very much a product of recent Iranian history, and understanding his early years and rise to power provides insight into current circumstances in Iran, known likely course of action, and the prospects for Iranian political reform.

Born on October 28, 1956, Ahmadinejad was the fourth child of a poor family who lived in a small village not far from Tehran, Iran's capital. A few years later, his father moved the family to Tehran, part of a massive migration of Iranian villagers to cities that began in the late 1950s, stimulated by policies undertaken by the Shah in response to American pressures.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, then Shah of Iran, had first come to power in 1941, and was restored to his throne with American and British help in a 1953 coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq. After the coup the Shah was widely understood as, in the words of a U.S. Ambassador, "a ward of the U.S." In the late 1950s American advice mattered. With the Cold War raging and concern about oil supplies high, the Eisenhower administration worried that the Shah's repressive regime would incite a social revolution. The resulting pressure to liberalize, which mounted during the Kennedy years, compelled the Shah to introduce a series of socioeconomic reforms collectively known as the White Revolution ("white" for its supposed nonviolent nature).

The reforms granted women the right to vote and stand as candidates in the political process, secularized education and increased access to schools, and tried (unsuccessfully) to enable Iran's religious minorities—principally Baha'i, Jews, and Christians—to take the oath of office on a holy book of their own choosing. The consequence of the "revolution," though, was land reform. With that, along with other elements of the White Revolution, the Shah, U.S. analysts thought, would trade support from the traditional but corrupt landed gentry for that of a newly enfranchised peasantry and a burgeoning middle class of technocrats, teachers, and shopkeepers. The Kennedy administration hoped land reform would bring about dramatic social change and reduce what was predicted as contemporary theories of modernization—political transformation and a more liberal polity. But Iran's land reform program was troubled from the start. Although a sizeable number of peasants received land, each plot was usually too small to sustain an entire family. Moreover, rising oil revenues were turning Tehran and other big cities into virtual El Dorados. Instead of producing an enfranchised peasantry and an urban middle class, land reform led millions of villagers to migrate to the cities in search of better lives, expediting the movement of people like the Ahmadinejads to Tehran.

Politically, things were no better. The secular opposition—left and center—never accepted the reforms as genuine. Embittered by the 1953 coup against a powerfully nationalist prime minister, they did not regard the Shah's regime as legitimate; it was, they said, a puppet of the United States, incapable of bringing about genuine change. The Shah himself, convinced that economic growth would guarantee his own survival, was unwilling to share political power with the new middle class, and certainly not with the poor masses converging on the cities. Nor, even more importantly, did the Shah's regime make any effort to socially integrate families like the Ahmadinejads, who had flocked to the cities but were uncomfortable with the cosmopolitan ethos they found there. Moreover, from the beginning the conservative clergy viewed the White Revolution as an affront to Islam and a dangerous move toward Western modernity. Ayatollah Khomeini immediately denounced the proposed reforms, led the clerical opposition, and spent eight months under house arrest for his speeches against the Shah, the reforms, and an impending bill granting U.S. citizens immunity from prosecution in Iranian courts. His arrest, in 1963, provoked powerful urban protest, the so-called uprising of 15 Khordad 1342, which led to a large number of deaths—thousands according to the opposition, 400 according to more reliable sources.

The pressure on Iran to liberalize, which had continued through much of the 1960s, ended with the Nixon administration. The Nixon doctrine rejected the idea that the United States should police the world and pushed instead for strengthening local military powers, with Iran serving as the new hegemonic force in the Persian Gulf. Given carte blanche to buy new weapons systems, the Shah faced with growing political pressure from below—grew increasingly authoritarian. Ignoring the letter and spirit of the Constitution, he banned all the existing parties and crafted a one-party system, calling the party Rastakhiz (meaning "resurgence" or "rebirth"), he decreed that every Iranian must join it and eventually ordered party officials to develop an ideology for the country "based on the laws of dialectics."

Like millions drawn to the city during those years, the Ahmadinejad family settled in one of Tehran's poorest neighborhoods and brought with them the cultural conservatism and traditional Islam of Iran's peasantry. Struggling to make a living through odd jobs, the elder Ahmadinejad continued to cultivate in his son an unending devotion to Islam. Even by the standards of other villagers, the family was unusually devout. As a boy, Ahmadinejad regularly accompanied his father to the mosque and insisted on performing all religious duties and rituals, even before the requisite age. While his parents were regular participants in neighborhood religious organizations, Ahmadinejad himself was keen on learning and reciting the Quran. Ahmadinejad became a hard-working, disciplined high school student, often finishing at the top of his class. In 1976 he took Iran's national university entrance exams, and claims his score ranked 132nd among more than 400,000 examinees that year (though the school chose to attend—the College of Science and Technology—was in the second-tier of such institutions). The Shah himself is said to have reconciled with his claim). Those years saw a sharp rise in the number of new mosques throughout Iran, and prayer rooms in high schools and colleges. Concerned about the growing strength of his political opponents on the left, the Shah saw the pietism of young men like Ahmadinejad as an antidote to communism. He failed to recognize the ambitions of clerics like Ayatollah Khomeini and their potential attraction to culturally alienated and economically disgruntled working class Iranians. Khomeini himself had been living in exile in Najaf, Iraq, since 1965, but his lectures on tafsiri-e-qah—his novel doctrine of guardianship by a leading Islamic jurist—were in circulation covertly among his followers in Iran. While clerical leaders willing to stay clear of politics were amply rewarded by the Shah's regime, those who sided with Khomeini's activist version of Shi'ism were sent to prison.

In 1977 U.S. policy in Iran changed suddenly once again. President Jimmy Carter's talk of human rights, and his apparent willingness to pressure the Shah to liberalize, emboldened the once-cowed Iranian opposition. Ahmadinejad was by then a college student and became active in organizing Islamic students. For young men like Ahmadinejad, the Shah's liberalization policies provided an opportunity to safely enter the world of politics. For the Shah, however, this "opening-up" proved disastrous. A mix of personal, political, economic, and social factors came together in the perfect political storm: the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Political openings are dangerous for despotic regimes. The Shah was forced to liberalize, under direct pressure from the United States, at a time when oil revenues and economic growth were declining sharply. In 1976, he had gone on what the CIA called a "leaping binge," giving away almost two billion dollars. Yet less than two years later, Iran was back to borrowing. And the Shah himself was sick.
Diagnosed with lymphoma and undergoing chemotherapy, he was on medication that made him depressed, paranoid, and pathologically indiscriminate. From his first days on the throne, he had shown a clear aversion to conflicts and advocated stability to withstand pressure, and the medication only augmented this tendency.

Ahmadinejad and his family were among the millions who became foot soldiers of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution. Khomeini and his allies used an intricate network of mosques, religious classes, Q Qatar, recitals, and even modern lecture halls to consolidate their hold on traditional families. They also attracted new allies from the burgeoning middle class by offering what seemed to be a less dogmatic, more rational vision of Shi'ism. The most successful such effort was made by Ali Shariati, a powerful orator whose lectures combined elements of Marxism, existentialism, structuralism, and the post-colonial theories of Franz Fanon with Shi'ism to fashion an ideology of social action. The clergy knew, through centuries of living close to the society, that the middle classes would be a dominant force in determining the future of Iran. Whoever formed an alliance with them would control the country's future.

Relying on the traditional pieties of the pious, the clergy's new middle class allies made them a formidable force. Ahmadinejad learned that lesson well.

The growing network of Islamic institutions almost went unnoticed by Iran's secret police. The Shah remained concerned about secular democrats and the left; he believed the clergy—who shared his hostility to these elements—were his strategic allies. He also believed that the enfranchised peasant class, grateful for the land he had given them, would come to his defense. He was wrong. Nor could the Iranian middle classes be bribed into political silence in return for a better economic life. The revolution was at least partly the result of this miscalculation.

Ironically, today many of the same clergy who rode the Shah's economic determinism into victory are banking on the same kind of ideology. Their new tool is the "China model," and many in the regime's leadership, notably Chairman of the Assembly of Experts, Hashemi Rafsanjani, think it represents the only way the regime can survive in its current form. According to this "model," the regime will allow the country to experience a liberalized economic boom, and in return the clergy will cling to its monopoly on power. For a variety of reasons, including the losses incurred by the Iraqi regime to reach China's savings rate or internal market, or its ability to attract foreign investments, the China model is a pipe dream for Iran.

The writings of Shariati, as well as the pre-Islamic writings of Jalal Al-Al'Ahmad, clearly show his influences in the Iranian regime to reach China's savings rate or internal market, or its ability to attract foreign investments, the China model is a pipe dream for Iran.
Variants on Binding

Miller’s knot, bag knot. I could have been a cut-up. Might collection
turn profession: occasional nibbit, carting jars of filters, I never found
the chopping knives. They outmoded. How smacked meat
turns the color of mahogany. Mahogany is key. To keep without
cold, try eggs in water-glass. To keep a pork blood from clot, use salt,
A vinegar for duck. Donkeys are good catch animals but kill calves.
Safely handle nature bulls only by a ring. Milk for the loving wine, tanpans,
restoration. A caryob when you think of me and fret the soul. I carry
a silverglass in my sack. Tie the neck to whip: opposing grieved knot, preventing fray.

—Stephanie Anderson

The Iranian Revolution opened an opportunity for Ahmadinejad to enter politics; that opportunity vastly expanded after the eight-year war with Iraq.

Saddam Husseini, who hated Persians as a matter of principle—his last words from the gallows were “death to Persians”—and who had been unhappy about a 1973 agreement he signed with Iran over border issues, saw an opportunity in leading his country out of weakness and international isolation. With support from Persian Gulf Arab states concerned about Shia radicalism, and perhaps the United States (it was rumored that they “discovered” the green light”), Saddam ordered an attack on Iran in September 1980.

After some early initial successes, Iraqi forces met stiff resistance. By 1982 they had been pushed back to their international borders. Many of the same Arab states that had encouraged Saddam to invade, expecting a quick victory, were now willing to pay reparations to Iran in return for a ceasefire. Khominei refused, saying the war would end only when Saddam was deposed. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan issued a presidential directive that made helping Iraq defeat Iran his administration’s official policy. The Soviet Union, France, Germany, England, and China offered arms and other aid to both sides. The war, begun by desperate ambition, continued by despot intransigence, and prolonged by the greed of many nations, went on for eight years, close to a million people died, with millions displaced on both sides.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards fought with particular ferocity, and among them was the young Ahmadinejad. His precise role in the war has been something of a mystery, but we know that the Revolutionary Guards, under-equipped in battle compared with the Iraqi army, used thugs of young volunteers, called Basiji, to break into meetings and assaults on heavily fortified Iraqi positions. Reliable reports describe the Islamic Republic using stand-ins for Shi’ism’s revered and messianic twelfth Imam, each appearing on the horizon astride his horse and serving to intimidate the young men who walked to their deaths.

When the war ended, and the Revolutionary Guards and the Basiji returned to their cities and villages, they were shocked by the corruption that had transformed many of the revolutionaries in the clerical leadership into very rich men. Some had enriched themselves by virtually taking over industries that had been confiscated from the old regime. Others had become rich as the result of the war itself—from selling ration cards or receiving kick-backs in black-market arms purchases. While some Revolutionary Guard commanders and Basiji leaders soon acquired wealth of fantastic proportion, the more devout members were deeply disturbed by it and began to plan for a return to the pieties of the early days of revolution. Ahmadinejad was among them.

The eight-year presidency of Ahmadi nejad’s predecessor, the reformist
Administration of Torture
A Documentary Record
From Washington to Abu Ghraib and Beyond
Jameel Jaffer and Amrit Singh
Foreword by Anthony D. Romero, ACLU Executive Director, and Steven R. Shapiro, ACLU Legal Director

"An extraordinary book. The documents that the ACLU has been able to wrest from government control are harrowing and the authors' treatment of them is judicious, meticulously researched, and ultimately damming."
— Rory Kennedy, film director, Ghosts of Abu Ghraib

Women as Weapons of War
Iraq, Sex, and the Media
Kelly Oliver

"Kelly Oliver's book offers a brilliant and unforgettable feminist critique of the recent wars in which 'women' have been used, once again, to fight and another war."
— Eduardo Mendieta, Stone Brook University

Architect of Global Jihad
The Life of Al Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri
Brynjnar Lia

A compelling and meticulously researched biography of one of the most influential strategists and thinkers in Islamist circles. Highly illuminating.

Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop
The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan
Antonio Giustozzi

"A balanced, objective, and un sermonized consideration of the emergence of the neo-Taliban."
— Peter Mandelson, author of The Taliban Columbia/Hurst

Ahmadinejad's 2005 election, one of his chief lieutenants observed after the victory, was no "accident." It was the result of "years of complicated, multifaceted planning" by a coalition that included Revolutionary Guards commandants, a handful of clerics, some leaders of the Basij (unhappy that the government had not yet given them jobs in the coveted civil service), and friends and allies of Ahmadinejad from day's mayor of Tehran. This coalition was helped to victory by Ayatollah Khamenei. Elected the most powerful man in the country today, Khamenei has legal control of the army, the police, the intelligence agencies, the Revolutionary Guards and Basij, the judiciary, and the country's radio and television stations. He also controls more than half of the Iranian economy through his control of the foundations (fouyad) created from wealth confiscated during the revolution.

In the weeks before the election, Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was running against Ahmadinejad, promised to work to curtail Khamenei's power. Rafsanjani, the presumed winner, talked more like a chief of state than a candidate. His message pleased Europeans who had long been suspicious of Rafsanjani as a leader with whom they could do business, but it angered Khamenei and helped secure Ahmadinejad's surprise victory. While Rafsanjani and the other losing candidates claimed that millions of dollars from public coffers had been illegally poured into the Ahmadinejad campaign, Khamenei "suggested" to all Revolutionary Guards commanders and Basij leaders that they should vote for Ahmadinejad, each taking as many family members along as they could. Moreover, Ahmadinejad benefited from his rival's complicity in creating the political situation that had come to pass. When Rafsanjani—the "mediator" inside the Iraqi regime who had arranged the secret Iran-Iraqi negotiations between Iran and the Iraqi administration—tried to reinvent himself as a candidate of reform, voters did not take him seriously.

Although Khamenei helped Ahmadinejad in power—it was rumored that after an eight-year troubled relationship with Khatami, the leader wanted an inexperienced and malleable president—he got more than he bargained for. After taking office, Ahmadinejad began a massive purge of the Iranian bureaucracy, installing allies in key positions. Ahmadinejad's administration has rightly been called a "baracks regime," with a majority of his cabinet officials and top managers coming from the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards and intelligence agencies. The size of this network of allies and supporters surprised nearly all observers and apparently even Khamenei himself. More importantly, Ahmadinejad not only made new appointments but also tried to change the criteria for them, recalling the early days of the revolution when publicly demonstrated piety was the sole basis for appointment to key positions in government and the economy. The most recent example of this shift is the appointment of an ex-Basij leader, with no experience in nuclear matters, as Iran's chief negotiator in the crucial and tense negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. Moreover, in the February 2006 elections this same group of Revolutionary Guards and Basij commanders captured a majority of seats in the parliament and ministerial positions.

The U.S. war in Iraq has strengthened Ahmadinejad's hand by turning his bid for a nuclear weapons program into an Iraqi nationalist cause. In the early 1970s Iran, with encouragement from the United States and Israel, launched an ambitious nuclear program. No fewer than twenty reactors were envisioned for the country. Some sources even claim that Israel had begun planning a joint program to help Iran develop missiles that could carry a nuclear payload. When the revolution came, Ayatollah Khomenei brought these programs to a grinding halt. Iran, he claimed, did not need a nuclear program, and he accused the Shah's involvement in it as another sign that he was the imperialists' lackey. Of course, ending the nuclear program in 1979 was also something of a necessity. With much of its foreign currency reserves frozen by the United States as punishment for the hostage crisis, Iran was facing a serious financial crisis.

But in 1984, Saddam Hussein began to use chemical weapons against both Iraqi Kurds and Iranian forces. While the United States warned the rest of the international community remained virtually silent, the regime in Tehran decided that it needed to revive the nuclear program and develop "an Islamic bomb" for its own security. In 1988, according to a recently declassified document, leaders of the Revolutionary Guards told Ayatollah Khomenei that the only way Iran could win the war with Iraq was with the acquisition of nuclear bombs. By then Iran's nuclear program had already been fully launched.

Instead of following the protocols of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, of which Iran had been one of the first signatories, the Islamic Republic, worried about reactions from the United States and Israel,
Red Glass Necklace

I lived in a tree house with four dogs, Sold drugs in Montana. What was there then? The heat on the grass and the smell of nit, Sour chokesherries, and tiny wild strawberries, and thubarb growing under the ilacs. Trains have almost killed me three times. Once in the winter in the frozen fishpond you could still watch sheets of gold under the ice. Someone had forgotten to remove the carp. Then again, I never been to Greece, Rome, Gay Purree. My ventures have been somewhat limited. As a child I found a red glass necklace in the sand. I thought it was buried treasure, but I never found out what the world was. I love Oleage oranges with their big warts and old tin trunks with travel stickers, I hear of an island that sank under the weight of its tourists. Always wondered what the real story was.

—John Spalding

A warmadnejad has turned man things to his advantage, but neither Israel, nor the Holocaust, nor Iran's nuclear program figured in his presidential campaign. Ahmadianejad was brought to power by his ability to understand and connect with the poor. He had mastered—in his words and deeds, his gestures and dress—a kind of populism that plays on fears and anxieties, especially among Iran's poor. Not only did he do well in the poorer sections of the city, he also carried the countryside. Even some from the middle class, unwilling to vote for the candidates, voted for Ahmadianejad.

To appeal to their technocratic impulses he uses the title of doctor, received when he finished his graduate studies in traffic engineering. Moreover, after Khameinei's "suggestion," the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij, along with their families, voted in the millions for him.

In interviews and speeches in Iran, he uses vernacular expressions and street idioms. He neatly always wears his uniform, including a white headlight (or turtleneck), baggy pants, and a baggy shirt (Iran forbids any clothing, on men or women, that might betray bodily curves), all invariably light in color. He never wears a tie—the unmistakable sign of modernity. And since Islam forbids the frivolous sensation of a razor blade on a man's face, Ahmadianejad's beard is also part of his persona. All aspects of his appearance are intended to signal the sharp tension between modern and traditionalists.

In the international media his traditional appearance is intended to be a challenge to the West, but at home it is equally provocative. Iran is a divided society, with a dedicated minority of about fifteen to twenty percent committed to the regime and its clerical leadership, and a disgruntled majority—some angry for economic reasons, others (especially women) alienated by the regime's cultural policies and the sheer social and legal constraints on their lives.

Pulsing beneath the restrictions of Islamic Iran, however, is a world of vibrant youthful cosmopolitanism. Three out of every five Iranians are under the age of thirty. Their dress and values are drawn less from traditional Islam than from the norms of a global avant-garde. They are Internet savvy: indeed Iran ranks number one in the world in number of bloggers per capita.

The decidedly modern aesthetic accomplishments of Iranian cinema—embodied in the work of masters like Abbas Kiarostami—are now a matter of global acclaim, and a less well-known but no less vibrant Renaissance is taking place in Iranian music. A generation of new composers, lyricists, musicians, and vocalists, equally at home with Western musical forms and the complexities of Persian classical music, have created a new genre that combines subtle social criticism with an ironic bite. Mohsen Namjoo—an internationally acclaimed artist from a traditional family—uses traditional "tar" to render jazz melodies and the guitar to play classical Persian music. Kook, easily Iran's most popular rock band, melds the guitar riff of Bob Dylan's voice with the bitter lyricism of Leonard Cohen, and hints of Persian classical music.

The society ruled by the mullahs is also undergoing something of a sexual revolution. For men and women, bodies have become vessels of protest, sometimes defiant and dangerously promiscuous. A recent study by Pomeroy's anthropologist Pardis Maleki reported that at least half the married women interviewed in the more affluent parts of Tehran admitted to extra-marital affairs. The number is startling when we remember that adultery is a capital crime in Iran. The law is not so draconian with regard to homosexuality. After Ahmadianejad's recent triumph, so many commentators questioned his strange claim that there are no homosexuals in Iran, not simply because it is obviously false, but because the regime has executed a number of people accused of homosexuality in the last few years. The regime is so averse to homosexuality—which they consider a sin, and its discussion a form of cultural imperialist—that it has, for many years now, offered to pay for sex change operations for anyone with a "problematic" sexual identity. Nonetheless, in Tehran there are parks and restaurants openly identified as homosexual meeting places. Those who are part of the Iranian Diaspora publish online magazines dedicated to serious discussion of the social condition of Iran's gay men and lesbians.

Ahmadianejad's conservatism quickly put him at odds with university students. In the early days of his presidency he planned to re-bury martyrs on university campuses, repeating his symbolic gesture as mayor of Tehran. Students rejected the idea and resisted vigorously, insisting on keeping university campuses free of religious iconography. Objecting to the idea afforded students an opportunity to show their dissatisfaction with the new president and his insistence on etching symbols of piety and martyrdom on the city landscape. The episode was one in a long line of confrontations between Ahmadianejad and university students who have been in the vanguard of the fight for justice and democracy.

Iran's social divisions were sharply captured in the 2005 presidential campaign. In a non-famous film made by his campaign, Ahmadianejad is shown walking into a simple room in a humble house in a lower-middle-class city neighborhood. It is his family home. He sits cross-legged in front of his parents. The scene on the toilet. His wife appears, clad from head to toe in a black chador. His children, too, are shown exhibiting their father's simplicity of style. The family is eating lunch, their manners are those of most Iranian working class or peasant families. The contrast with Rafsanjani's campaign was glaring. In one ad, the candidate sits around a big oval table with young men and women, all dressed in white,able, affluent, urban attire. One of the girls, preferably covering her hair, complains about the lack of entertainment for youth; the camera then focuses on Rafsanjani, with tears of sympathy for her plight. While Rafsanjani was clearly appealing to society's upper crust and its youth, Ahmadianejad, in all he said and did during the campaign, was appealing to the society's poor and playing upon their anxieties and resentment about the revolution's unfulfilled economic promises. He campaigned on a message of ending corruption and giving the poor an equitable share of the country's oil wealth.

Ahmadianejad's provincialism is another aspect of his populist appeal. Save for a brief trip to Austria many years ago, Ahmadianejad had not traveled outside of Iran before becoming president. (In this respect, as well as others, he bears striking resemblance to President George W. Bush. According to a popular joke in Iran, there are three things Bush and Ahmadianejad share: both came to power in contested elections, both talk to God, and neither is educated.) His provincialism has begun to show a arrogant swagger and a disdain not just for the West but also for Iranians who know the West or advocate closer ties with it. Compounding his willful insularity is his belief that God has chosen him to perform. His will and that a divine force protects him. After returning from his second U.N. trip last year, he told a cleric that during his speech in the General Assembly he was protected by a sacred light. When the cleric recounted how God, once again, had foiled the unblinking eyes of all the world's leaders on Ahmadianejad. While his critics posted a secret tape of this conversation on the Internet (where for months it was a favorite), supporters spoke of his "genius," his "divine wisdom," and his role as "the miracle of the third millennium." When he wrote his infamous puzzling, wide-ranging letter to President Bush in May 2006—about history and international affairs, the failure of "liberalism and Western-style democracy" and the centrality of God in global aspirations, and the teachings of the great prophets, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad—he adminis
EMANUEL’S WORDS ARE MEASURED AND AUTHORITATIVE. WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE SHOULD HELP REDUCE THE HUGE GAP BETWEEN WHAT IS UNDERSTOOD BY THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND WHAT IS KNOWN BY THE PEOPLE WHO NEED TO KNOW, THE PUBLIC AND POLICY MAKERS.”

JAMES HANSEN, NASA GODDARD INSTITUTE FOR SPACE STUDIES

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE
KERRY EMANUEL
with an afterword on what to do next by Judith Layzer and William R. Mason
Cloth $15.00
From the author of Divine Wind, an introduction to the science of climate change and how the scientific consensus around it has emerged.

Kerry Emanuel, Professor of Atmospheric Science in the Department of Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences at MIT, was one of Time magazine’s 2006 “Time 100: The People Who Shape Our World.”

BOSTON REVIEW
THE MIT PRESS mitpress.mit.edu

ers spoke of it as a divinely inspired text, something to be studied in every high school in Iran.

By the time Ahmadinejad made his third trip to the U.N., in September 2007, another key component of his political vision had become the subject of considerable inquiry and criticism, particularly inside Iran. One of Ahmadinejad’s top assistants, a member of the cabinet, signed a covenant with the Mahdi, the twelfth Imam in Iranian Shi’ism, its missing messiah, Iranian Shias are referred to as twelve; unlike other Shias they believe that there have been twelve Imams, all of them descendants of the last Imam, Ali, and his wife, Fatema, daughter of the prophet Mohammad. They also believe that the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, has gone into hiding, or occultation. This occultation of the twelfth Imam will end with the return of the Mahdi, who will establish a perfectly just Islamic society in a world plunged in chaos and war, laying the basis for the Day of the Resurrection.

Some Hadith—words or deeds attributed to the prophet and his progeny, and next to the Quran considered the most important source of Islamic jurisprudence—indicate that the missing messiah will one day emerge from the well at Chorokh, near the river. For centuries Chorokh, sometimes called Jamsherd, was a dry well and a derelict mosque some hundred miles outside Tehran. When Ahmadinejad came to power, he spent millions from the public coffers to build roads and tourist facilities to facilitate visits to Chorokh, and successfully turned it into a popular pilgrimage site. He also substantially increased funding for a new institute, in the city of Qom, whose mission is to search the sacred texts of Shi’ism for hints about signs of the twelfth Imam’s return. Ahmadinejad had once said that the purpose of his presidency is to help expedite the return of the messiah. Many, leading Iranian clergy have recently criticized this aspect of Ahmadinejad’s politics, as well as the corresponding surge of claims by people (including public figures) to have “seen” or “contacted” the twelfth Imam.

It is a measure of Ahmadinejad’s Machiavellian guile, the paradoxical charisma of his anti-hero person, and the effectiveness of his populist anti-corruption campaign that in his first months in office he claimed a mandate and amassed more power than even Khatami, who had won two landslide victories. After all, the Iranian Constitution contains serious obstacles to presidential accumulation of power. Moreover, Ahmadinejad won the 2005 election only after a hotly contested election, in which allegations of foul play.

But Ahmadinejad’s meteoric rise was soon followed by a less spectacular fall from grace. One problem was that Ayatollah Khamenei and the other leaders of the Islamic Republic came quickly to see that Ahmadinejad and his verbal outbursts were becoming a serious liability. Nothing was more emblematic of this problem than his vocal anti-Semitism, which, like much else in his vision, was not acquired casually but has roots in his experiences during the early days of the revolution.

Soon after the creation of the Islamic Republic, a series of lectures and discussions were held in Tehran led by a sternly conservative cleric, Mohammad Baqir Yazdi, and a philosopher named Ahmad Farid, a student of German philosophy and a disciple of Heidegger. Farid believed that the concerns of Muslims in the post-colonial world—its carnage, and most of all the anti-Semitism of the West—called for a new philosophical approach to life and the world. This approach, he argued, would be undergirded by a sophisticated and abstract form of existential philosophy. Heidegger, who was the leading philosopher in Europe at the time, had been exiled from Germany, where he was considered a fascist.”
disappearance of hundreds of millions of dollars of governmental funds. Ahmadinejad's government has not only spent the entire windfall revenue from oil price increases, but it has also depleted the country's foreign reserves, which is a government practice when the price of oil falls. As always the poor—now a quarter of the country's population—bear the brunt of these disastrous inflationary policies.

In this connection, Ahmadinejad's failing program has had three key components. The first is the belief of exporting the Islamic Revolution and creating a "Shia revolutionary arc" in the Muslim world. Like Trotsky, who rejected the idea of socialism in one country, Ahmadinejad believes that Iran's Islamic Revolution will survive only if it leads other Muslims in the fight against a weak and declining West. In recent months, he has talked more ambitiously about Muslims generally and not only about Shia.

The second component of his program is the idea that the Islamic regime can maintain its dignity and achieve its goals only if it stands firm on plans for a nuclear weapons program. For Ahmadinejad, Khatami and his chief negotiator on the nuclear issue, Rashidi, committed treachery and have been wrong to suspend the program.

A few days after Iran announced that it had enriched uranium successfully, Ahmadinejad and his allies declared that "the West can do nothing," adding that Iran must push forward aggressively in all aspects of the program. Shortly after Putin's recent and historic visit to Iran, Ahmadinejad made two incredible claims in a televised interview: first, that Iran has won the public opinion battle around the world over the legitimacy of its nuclear program, and that the West will soon give up its opposition to Iran's nuclear program; and second, still more incredibly, that "Iran is now one of the nine nuclear powers in the world." That the West must begin to share their global power with Iran.

The third component of Ahmadinejad's foreign policy is intimately linked with the second, and is referred to by the Iranian daily newspaper as the "Asia Look." According to this notion, Iran's future no longer rests with the declining West but with the ascendant East—particularly China and India. Multi-billion-dollar oil and gas agreements with both countries, and negotiations for the construction of a pipeline connecting Iran to India through Pakistan and eventually to China, would allow Iran to have a rapidly growing market for the country's oil and gas. Moreover, both China and India have nuclear technologies that they could share with Iran, and based on this past behavior, neither is likely to "meddle" in Iranian domestic affairs, particularly on issues of human rights and democracy. Ahmadinejad is further convinced that Russia, with its new, more muscular foreign policy and its desire to embarrass the United States, and China, with its "irresistible appetite for energy," would never allow the passage of a U.N. resolution against Iran.

The failure of nearly every aspect of Ahmadinejad's program—excluding his failure to fight corruption or improve the economic plight of the poor—has cast his domestic popularity to decline sharply. In a poll conducted in late September, 36 percent of the electorate voted for him at election day; but if they had been asked to vote for him again, when we remember that only sixty percent of eligible voters participated in the last presidential election and that Ahmadinejad won barely more than fifty percent of the votes, his precarious political situation at home becomes clear. On the international front, the U.N. passed two resolutions against the Islamic Republic's nuclear program, with Chinese and Russian support, Ahmadinejad's cautionary response to the U.N. resolutions, dismissing them as "nothing more than a worthless piece of paper," brought him an avalanche of criticisms—even from the regime's strongest supporters. Furthermore, Russia decided to delay completion of the Bushehr nuclear reactor, and the Sunni states are beginning to unite against Shia Iran.

But the most important cause of Ahmadinejad's decline has been the near breakdown of the Iranian economy. In spite of record earnings from oil, there has been massive capital flight, a shrinking private sector, a banking crisis, and an increase in oil dependency and subsidies paid by the regime. The oil sector itself is facing serious structural problems due to decaying infrastructure. If trends persist, and Iran cannot attract an estimated six hundred billion dollars of investment in the oil industry, Iranian oil exports may collapse completely within a decade. With unemployment in double digits, the regime is now facing stagnation—high inflation rates and rapidly rising prices—as well as a depression-like "recession."

Ahmadinejad recently has been facing hostile crowds at college campuses and mounting parliamentary criticism. In the past year, Ahmadinejad tried to assure himself against this rising opposition by consolidating his relationship with the Revolutionary Guards with multi-billion-dollar no-bid contracts—in one case, an eleven-billion-dollar contract with the Guards and their companies. The Guards are an economic juggernaut, active in nearly every aspect of the economy. But even these bribes have not silenced all of the Revolutionary Guard commanders. A few have publicly criticized Ahmadinejad and his policies, believing that he is jeopardizing the future of the regime. The website Bazela, close to Mohsen Rezaei, who was for eighteen years the chief commander of the Revolutionary Guards, has become increasingly and openly critical of Ahmadinejad. In late September, Ahmadinejad closed the website down.

Ironically, Ahmadinejad's and his rhetoric of confrontation—his tendency to taunt the United States and Israel with words of threats and aggression, in his parlance—no less than his dismissals of any possibility of U.S. invasion, does something to enable those in Washington who have for years tried to push the United States into a war with Iran. With about a third of the U.S. Navy patrolling the waters off the Iranian coast, and with more than 150,000 U.S. soldiers standing nose to nose with Iran and its Revolutionary Guards, chances increase that a "mistake" will spark a full-blown war. In recent months, Ahmadinejad and his cabinet of radical Revolutionary Guards commandos have engaged, in their own words, in a "show of force" by sending Iranian drones over U.S. ships and, in one case, sending a diver to place a sticker with the logo of the Revolutionary Guards on the hull of an American destroyer.

Even more dangerous is the fact that Bush's hyperbole, including talk of a "total war," only makes a military confrontation with Iran more likely. And a military confrontation with the United States or Israel would be a godsend gift for Ahmadinejad. With his popularity plummeting and the economy in decline, only an American or Israeli attack on Iran can help Ahmadinejad and his radical allies consolidate power and save his presidency.

In truth, the only solution to the "Iran problem"—from the nuclear question to Iran's regional support for Islamist groups such as Hezbollah's Hizbollah—is for the centuries-old dream of democracy to become a reality. Ahmadinejad is fully aware of this danger and has done everything to forestall democratic change. Since taking office, he has closed virtually every opposition paper, stepped up censorship of films and books, attempted to dismantle the student movement, and suppress the embryonic labor union movement, and tried to intimidate Iranian women who were beginning to find a public voice.

The possibility of democracy in Iran is today a subject of considerable controversy. Skeptics point to the increasing financial muscle of the regime (through skyrocketing oil prices, verging

---

**Trust the bag with the god on the tag**

**Warranted for life since 1986**

**Available exclusively online**

[CourierWare.com](http://www.CourierWare.com) 1-800-678-bags
The Whole False History of Human Beings

There are gorges castles in Firoozabad and ponderous
To live in now, tho' the owners who did live
In them are all famous and as modern as possible

Then, which means firesplace and a square bulge in many walls.
To lift food up to them or slide down, two different holes.
On different sides of the cold damp rooms.

Dito in England. In Ireland there were bigger castles, beautiful monsters.
And we who now think of as Germans wanted them.
These so-called Germans, actually Moslemrings, lived in quonset
Huts of straw, branches, and, oh, a little advice.
They were more workable than the Nazis and nearly as foolish.
Bolted dead on the Irish walls their first trip.
(They had many more boats to get there.)

(Numerous survivors of boiling were allowed to return to Mevorgin to tell the tale.
As a warning). The tale got the German collective psychic blood boiling
And naturally they went back and this time the Irish,
Who were better cleverer vousser fighters if you can imagine,
Chopped up all for a few, cleverly chopped up.
The trunks of bodies besides the obvious appendages and nuts
And dice, and only a few survivors were allowed.

To return to Mevorgin to tell the tale.
The Irish made them cast off from Ireland in their little boats.

With bags of axes, hoes, and the aforementioned creative carvings.
Of pieces of trunks together with bags of German or Mevorogin genials.

But the Germans or Mevorogin threw these in the deep sea.

While returning to Germany where more collective blood boiled
And they were hysterically stirred up and vowed to do.

Things I hesitate to mention here. So, right, they went back
And the Irish ate them all. These were some castles, thick, big
And organized, unlike our castles in California where there are two.

The Hotest Castle which contains bone art and knickknab art and the Dylan castle
Which is just a big house at the end of Las Vegas Road on the sea

That outside looks like a castle but inside has the amenities
Gas heat, hardwood floors, subzero fridge, and lots of guitars
And amplifiers and phones, unlike the Irish castles.

Today people are different too, including the famous like Bob and Iran,
The powerful like William Randolph.

And us, the simply well-known, and also the illegal immigrants and the managers and grocery buggers are different than the Irish
And the old Germans or Mevorogin. We are like bricks or stones

Placed next to each other and on each other for strength, warmth, and companionship.
Imagine such mutually beneficial purposes in the one arrangement.

A wall or stairs as it goes up into the sky to make a home!

—Arthur Vogelsang

Sistani's quietest version of Shi'ism, have been more openly critical of the regime's interpretation of Shi'ism. According to the quietist school, an Islamic government's interpretation of God on earth, obeying its words and commands is incumbent on all citizens and leaves no room for error. Until the "return" of the twelfth Imam, then, no such government can be created. In the meantime, according to Ayatollah Sistani and others in this school, the duty of the clergy is simply to supervise the moral life of the flock. This view is in direct conflict with Ayatollah Khomeini's activist version of Shi'ism, which holds that the clergy can and must seize power any time the opportunity arises itself.

An even larger number of those working with the regime, particularly among the thousands of often-Western-educated mid-level managers, are increasingly aware that the status quo is untenable. As the economy continues to falter, and as radicals like Ahmadinejad seek more stringent enforcement of Islamic laws—by, for example, charging more than 160,000 women in the past two months of being insufficiently veiled—it is easy to imagine the emergence of a grand coalition, consisting of technocrats within and outside the regime, disgruntled reformists, quixotic clerics, members of the Iranian private sector, women demanding equality, students, democratic parties, and labor unions, all willing to compromise in favor of a better society. That coalition, joined by Iran's civil society organizations and even members of the Diaspora, could come together on a program of building a more democratic republic, free of the despotic power of the guardian-jurist, Prudent U.S.-policy—principled, unconditional negotiations with the regime in Tehran on all outstanding issues, and continuing insistence on the democratic and human rights of the Iranian people—can help expedite the formation of such a coalition.

An offer of unconditional negotiations would, if accepted, bring about a thaw in U.S.-Iranian relations and improve the political climate and that of those within the regime who have been advocating such a proponent. If such an offer is rejected, it is only likely to strengthen tensions within the regime, and such increased tensions can only help democratic forces. Rejection of such an offer is also likely to further anger the Iranian middle classes, who have been advocating normalized relations with the world. Attacking Iran, or even empty saber rattling, can only strengthen the radicals' hold on a threatened citizenry.

A strategy in Iran that forges democracy through a politics from below would have ramifications throughout the Middle East, Radical Islam embraces a vision of theocratic rule founded on revealed truth: this project is as much a challenge to China and India, Brazil and Mexico, Turkey and Egypt, as it is to the United States. It is a challenge to modernity itself, not simply the West. Only a large, active coalition of the silent majority of Muslims—both Shia and Sunni, keen on a spiritual reading of Islam—can defeat it, and create an Iranian democracy genuinely worthy of the name.