Assessing the Strength of Iranian Opposition Groups

May 11, 2011

Central Questions

• How strong are Iranian opposition groups?

• What are the regime’s strategies?
  – Can it rally support through its nuclear program?

• What are the roles of the Iranian security forces?
  – How much influence do they possess?
Summary

- Iran today: Opposition groups are not strong
  - Regime is coup-proofed
  - Uses nuclear program to rally support
  - Social Media – used by regime and opposition

- Strength of opposition groups depends on the domestic balance of power

- There are indicators that suggest a regime is weakening

Agenda

1. Framework
2. Iranian Opposition and Regime
   - Indicators
3. Iranian Nuclear Program
4. Social Media
5. Conclusions
Building a Framework

• Critical Elements
  – Why opposition groups vary in strength:
    • Opposition Characteristics
    • Regime Characteristics
    • Background Variables
  – Why the framework is useful:
    • Applicable to other nations
    • Can be used over time
    • Provides indicators of opposition group strength

Regime Types: Based on Political Competition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opposi0n</th>
<th>Regime Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Liberal Democracies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Fragile Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Failed Regimes</td>
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Iranian Opposition Groups

1. Green Movement
2. Islamic Iran Participation Front
3. Confederation of Iranian Students
4. People's Mujahedin of Iran

Opposition Strength

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Weak</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Coordinate Multiple Large Protests</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Sustain Multiple Large Protests</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Raise Resources for Sustained Campaign</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Unpaid bounties on opposition members</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Replace Strategic and Operational Leadership</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Diverse Membership</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Generate Responses from the Regime</td>
<td>✗</td>
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Opposition Group Strategies

• Raise awareness
  – Protests, rallies, social media

• Recruit diverse membership
  – Set common goals

• Undermine legitimacy of regime
  – Co-opt key groups

The Iranian Regime

• Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)
  – Basij, Qods

• Artesh (regular army)

• Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS)

• Clerical Elites
Current Iranian Regime Strategies

- Crackdowns on Opposition Groups
  - Violence
  - Suspension of civil liberties

- Coup-Proofing
  - Creating competition between institutions
  - Balancing powerful constituencies

- Diversi®onary Tactics
  - Rallying support for nuclear program
  - Instigating Nationalism
The Iranian “Nuclear Card”

Important groups invested in the program:
- Scientific Community
- Students
- General Population
- Military and Paramilitary
- Clerical Elites

The regime maintains support by:
- Investing in the program
- Linking Iran’s future to the program
- Stressing external threats facing Iran
- Appealing to nationalism

Iranian Nuclear Program

Reasons for Iran’s Nuclear Program

- Deter External Dominance: 50%
- Preserve NPT Right to Energy: 59%
- Enhance Great Power Status: 61%
- Enhance Technical Competence: 74%
- Secure Energy Needs: 76%

Percent Agree with Regime Position

- Approve of regime position: 1%
- Should not pursue fuel cycle program: 8%
- Should develop weapon: 20%
- None of the above: 5%
- Refused/Did not know: 66%
Social Media is a Double-Edged Sword

**Opposition**
- To coordinate
- To attract attention
- To disseminate information
- To act as virtual sanctuary

**Regime**
- To project strength and presence to opposition groups
- To monitor and destabilize opposition groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bahman25</th>
<th>65,000+ friends</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Against Bahman25</td>
<td>17 friends</td>
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Application to Iran

<table>
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<th>Opposition</th>
<th>Regime</th>
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<td>Strong</td>
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- Shah’s Iran
- Iran 1979
- Iran 2011
Conclusions

• Regime strength and opposition strength are interrelated

• Iran has a history of and capability to successfully use coercion to suppress opposition

• Iranian opposition groups are weak, and few have the potential to become strong

Questions?