

Iran: A Butterfly

Chicago.

ALTHOUGH it is not popular to admit it in public, the Iranian revolution is one of the great events of our century, equal in importance to such other momentous upheavals as the Mexican, Russian and Chinese revolutions. We have

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been privileged in our generation to witness, through the offices of our instantaneous communications network, the marvelous phenomenon of an entire people in the process of drastically transforming their design for living together.

Iran is a laboratory of rapid social change, from which the vast Islamic world will draw lessons which have not yet been clearly defined. But, from Jakarta to Cairo, one thing is already clear: the masses of once-fatalistic Moslems will never again be quiescent. They are preparing to take their place in the modern world and to initiate that wonderfully agonizing struggle to reconcile tradition with self-determination and technological progress.

Much as we may find reprehensible many of the results of the Iranian revolution, candor, justice and practicality oblige us to acknowledge that it is as genuine and deeply rooted a change as was our own revolution. An authentic revolution is an extraordinary and rare political event similar to the transformation of an insect from its larval to its adult stage. Just as it is impossible to put a butterfly back into the cocoon from which it emerged, a revolution cannot be reversed and a previous stage of society restored. Iran will no more return to the days of the Shah than the United States will become once again a colony of Great Britain.

Living in a society that is 200 years distant from its revolutionary founding, we often fail to appreciate the enormous social energies set loose by drastic, rapid and comprehensive change. Indeed, it seems to be a law of modern history that more stable societies grossly underestimate the strength of revolutionary eruptions, embarking on futile endeavors to roll them back.

The War of 1812 did not restrain "the first new nation," the United States, nor were all the other European powers able to bring France back into the fold of traditional monarchies after 1789. More recently, the expeditionary forces of the Unit-

ed States, Britain, France and Japan only strengthened the Russian revolution when they invaded the Soviet Union after World War I. It is deeply ironic that the very nations that defended themselves successfully against a suspicious and hostile world after their own revolutions often are the most forceful opponents of new transformations.

Revolutionary regimes are understandably unpopular among the states nearby. The energies, of a newly mobilized population press outside their borders, creating the threat of disruption elsewhere. Even the most antagonistic governments will tend to cooperate in efforts to contain or destroy a revolution that has arisen in their midst. They may even mistake, at their peril, the ferment of transformation for weakness and attempt to seize an advantage. Just such shortsightedness and greed led to the current American imbroglio with Iran.

Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein decided to exploit what he perceived as weakness in post-revolutionary Iran by making a territorial grab. His misguided invasion of Iran resulted in a protracted and devastating war that he could not win. And then, through a Byzantine diplomatic strategy, he succeeded in getting a good part of the world on his side, preeminently the United States. Yet even having gained the great powers as his uneasy accomplices, Iraq's strongman has not made Iran yield.

The Reagan administration claims that it has sent a flotilla into the Persian Gulf in order to preserve the freedom of navigation. But the threats to shipping are greater now than before the United States reflagged Kuwaiti tankers. It is reasonable to conclude that, despite its egregious confusion in matters of foreign policy, the administration's real aim is damage control, to save Iraq at the behest of the Arab states. This is an imprudent and unworthy aim for our policy.

We must face the fact that the Iranian revolution is here to stay and that we will have to forge a constructive relationship with Iran when it begins to stabilize, as all revolutionary regimes do. The only beneficial course for the United States is to use its influence to help engineer an end to the Iran-Iraq war that will allow Iran to save face. Only then will we have the chance to play a constructive role in the region and gain the respect of all of the parties to the present calamity.

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