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Trends. Immediate Implications of the Khatami Interview

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Many commentators have termed the interview by Cable News Network's (CNN) Christiane Amanpour of Iran's President Mohammad Khatami to be "interesting." IBPP offers four immediate implications. (1) Khatami's call for cultural but not governmental contacts between Iranians and citizens of the United States (US) is an example of sophisticated information warfare against the US Government (USG). By discounting the need for formal and public contact with the USG, he is plainly suggesting that the USG--allegedly a government by the people, of the people, and for the people--is anything but such an entity. He also is conflating this suggested lack of legitimacy at home with a suggested hypocrisy and emptiness of a USG-professed foreign policy goal--spreading democracy. Certainly there are many historical examples of USG initiatives towards Iran--examples of clandestine operations and covert action-- to give some support to his suggestion. (2) Since the return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran, the USG has had a star-crossed delusion concerning Iranian political moderates. The USG needs to be extremely careful that the situation does not become one of--as US President Reagan, whose administration itself was a tragic victim of this delusion, said in a different context--"here we go again." (3) If some overall positive moves between the USG and Iran can indeed occur, the USG dual containment policy towards Iran and Iraq--that has been effectively critiqued in many quarters including IBPP (3(20))--may finally be on the road to being changed in favor of something more supportive of peace in the Mideast as well as USG security needs. (4) Khatami's use of CNN illustrates how much easier it is becoming to employ telecommunications to reach a nation's people over its formal political leaders. This should cause concern not only among totalitarian leaders, but authoritarian and democratic ones as well. Media such as television, radio, email, and the Internet are not necessarily more of a boon or bane to any particular form of government. (See Erlanger, S. (January 8, 1998). Greeting Iran's overture, U.S. insists on more. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Iran, Iraq, and Dual Containment: The Unbalanced Balance. (December 19, 1997). IBPP, 320; Sciolino, E. (January 8, 1998). Iranian President calls for cultural exchanges with America. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>.)