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Mullah Mulling In Iran

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Abstract. This article describes the main threats and psychopolitical options facing religious conservatives who seek to maintain supreme, earthly power in Iran.

Internal and external threats to the supreme political power of religious conservatives in Iran have continued to present formidable challenges ever since the fall of the Shah in 1979.

Internal threats. (1) Continuous splitting, fragmentation, and reintegration within groupings of religious conservatives: although these dynamic phenomena are usually couched in the language of religious disagreement and out-Islamicizing fellow Islamists, pure strivings for political power and control often impel the phenomena. (2) Contestations of political power both from more moderate religious groupings and even from secular entities: while both types of groupings seem to come from different ends of an ideological spectrum, they share important similarities. They both frequently and inadvertently increase the cohesion and homogeneity of the religious conservatives and, thus, assuage the threat described in (1) above. Both also can be easily tarred with the brush of religious counterrevolution and apostasy--a tarring that can lead to death. (3) A sense of satisfaction from the great masses of people: this sense is usually amorphous, but when crystallized it can suddenly precipitate behaviors that are uncontrollable. Because this last threat has such extreme potential for those seeking to maintain or wrest control, most power contestants spend vast resources in assessing and influencing the threat. Too often, these resources succeed in maintaining a factitious and fictitious satisfaction in controlling the people's uncontrollable sense of satisfaction.

External Threats. (1) Regional economic and political threats from Arab powers and Israel: these threats are largely comprised by continuous fluctuations in balances of power stemming from currency values, gross national products, and weaponization of technologies. Perhaps the greatest direct--even if potential--consequence of these threats is an impact on the sense of satisfaction of masses of Iranians. (2) Distal economic, political, and cultural threats from the United States and the latter's Western allies: the cultural aspect of this threat is probably most significant because it is perceived by many religious conservatives as having potentially dire consequences for their ideological level of control. (3) The increasingly globalized world--especially in communications, transportation, and economics: from the perspective of many religious conservatives, this world too easily increases the permeability of physical, psychological, and spiritual barriers.

The religious conservatives have recourse to combinations of only five main psychopolitical options--better conceptualized as choice points. These options involve personal freedoms, economic opportunity, war, formally approved ideology and ritual, and internal security controls. All five options are interdependent and have mutually synergistic and antagonistic consequences. Most problematic are antagonisms, such as between personal freedoms and internal security controls and between personal freedoms and formally approved ideology and ritual. The cumulative synergisms and antagonisms between other groupings--e.g., war, formally approved ideology and ritual, and economic opportunity--are more difficult to delineate.

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The interdependence among options presents a challenge to any group of rulers--not just the religious conservatives of Iran. For example, the Chinese may now be struggling with antagonisms between economic opportunity and internal security controls. Moreover, rulers of the People's Republic of China seem to have found that economic opportunity may have actually de-energized the option of formally approved ideology and ritual prescribed by Communism. To this latter point--a massive irony--might be a similar fate for Iran. As the Communism of the Great Helmsman Mao has ceased to politically cohere the masses, the ruling mullahs of Iran may only succeed in effecting a similar fate for the political Shi'ism of Ayatollah Khomeini. (See Alschuler, L.R. (1997). Jung and politics. In P. Young-Eisendrath et al. (Ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Jung*. Cambridge, England UK: Cambridge University Press; Crump, J.I. (1996). Chan-kuo Ts'e. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for Chinese Studies (The University of Michigan); Landwehr, L.J. (1981-1982). A discrepancy measurement of subjective political power. *Political Psychology*, 3, 50-69; Muzzling dissent in Iran. (August 9, 1999). *The New York Times*, p. A18; Neely, T.W. (1928). The sources of political power: A contribution to the sociology of leadership. *American Journal of Sociology*, 33, 769-783.) (Keywords: Iran, Power.)