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# Apologies for Apologies Towards Iran and by the Vatican

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**Abstract.** This article describes psychological difficulties in making apologies for past misbehavior in the political world.

Apologies for misbehavior in the political world can be constituted by a number of intents of the apologizer and a number of interpretations of the apologizee. Intents and interpretations may converge or differ concerning an apology as a sincere expression of regret--even repentance--for misbehavior. Or apology may be perceived as actual regret or repentance. Yet again apology may be perceived as a plea for pardon with or without regret or repentance. In addition, apology may be perceived as an explanation and/or justification for misbehavior. Or apology may be perceived as some inferior substitute for regret, repentance, their expressions, pleas for pardon, explanations, or justifications. Moreover, apology may be perceived as but an instrumental vehicle for some material, psychological, and/or spiritual gain. All the above may be further colored with perceived veils of deception or transparencies of truth.

Two recent communications bear witness to the difficulties in achieving convergence between apologizer and apologizee. The first is a speech by the United States Secretary of State including a reference to "a significant role in orchestrating the overthrow of Iran's...prime minister...(by) the Central Intelligence Agency....". The speech according to The New York Times "acknowledge(s) the facts and hint(s) at American wrongdoing...but (is) neither (to) apologize nor explain." Further complicating the hoped for convergences alluded to in the previous paragraph is the Issue that an apology may be labeled as nothing of the kind, while communications labeled as an apology may be nothing of the kind. As well, the sum total of apolokees--viz., the Iranian "people" who come in direct or indirect contact with the communications--is comprised of numerous segments that may well vary in interpretive strategy and content.

The second communication includes formal comments by Pope John Paul II during a Sunday Mass concerning "the betrayal of the Gospel...deviations of the past...forgiveness for our sins...for the use of violence that some have resorted to in the service of truth and for the acts of dissidence and of hostility sometimes taken towards followers of other religions." An additional complicating factor beyond those mentioned for the US Secretary of State is that of the apologizees' segmentation of the apologizer. Here the Issue is whether the Pope is or should be speaking just about individuals espousing Roman Catholicism, officials of the Church, relevant religious texts, the Church itself, or even God.

A student of the psychology of apology might conclude--as with most variants of persuasive communications--that the apology may only reinforce the commitment of the committed. (See Haley, J.O. (1998). Apology and pardon: Learning from Japan. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 41, 842-867; Meyerhoff, M. (1999). Sorry in the Pacific: Defining communities, defining practices. *Language in Society*, 28, 225-238; Sanger, D. U.S. ending a few of the sanctions imposed on Iran. *The New York Times*, p. A1; A5; Scher, S. J., & Darley, J. M. (1997). How effective are the things people say to apologize? Effects of the realization of the apology speech act. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 26, 127-140; Scobie, E. D., & Scobie, G. E. W. (1998). Damaging events: The perceived need for forgiveness.

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Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 28, 373-401; Stanley, A. (March 13, 2000). Pope asks forgiveness for errors of the Church over 2,000 years. The New York Times, p. A1; A10.) (Keywords: Albright, Apology, Iran, Pope John Paul II, United States.)