

The Iran Protests: The Revolution is Dead. Long Live the Revolution!

January 13, 2018



An Alternative to the Politics of “National Security” Emerges

Days of protests in Iran have caught statesmen, analysts and observers by surprise, even though the anti-austerity and anti-establishment sentiments behind this primarily working-class revolt have been brewing for years. All the same, surprise is not a common reaction across the media.

An early analysis expressed in a tweet by the popular and self-styled Marxist pundit, Ali Alizadeh, captures a sentiment which is common to an array of responses to these events by individuals and groups as disparate, in both aim and ideas, as the Iranian reformists, the Iranian postcolonial left, and middle-class Iranians both inside and outside Iran. Alizadeh asks: “Do you realize that it is because [Iran’s] [national] security is [safeguarded by the Islamic Republic of Iran], and [because] external threats [to Iran’s regional security] have been minimized [by the policies of the IRI], that the right to protest [inside Iran] is now recognized [by the IRI government]?...[This is why I] insist that [regional] security is the prerequisite to everything else, including [civil, political and personal] freedoms.”

Here, Alizadeh suggests that the prerequisite to the growth of democracy inside Iran is the long term stability of the IRI state, given that the many international and civil wars that plague the region have imperilled the prospects of long term security and democracy in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Libya. Over the years, reformist, postcolonial and conservative commentators have employed narratives similar to Alizadeh’s as a key reason for supporting the Iranian reformist movement. Offering itself as the only viable alternative for political change in Iran that does not jeopardize the safety and stability of the Iranian people and state, the Iranian reformist movement has largely deployed Alizadeh’s narrative toward establishing hegemony over articulations and mobilizations of dissent inside Iran. The reformists claim that concrete political change inside Iran, and any transfer of power from the conservative faction of power spearheaded by Ayatollah Khamenei to the Iranian people, is possible only via their gradualist and revisionist agenda.

The IRI’s priority of internal security over regional stability is, however, inverted in Alizadeh’s analysis. In reality, the signature strategy of the IRI’s foreign policy is to police the Middle East region in order to police dissent inside Iran: as long as the Middle East is unstable and the IRI must take an active part in securing its interests all over the region, all political projects for change inside Iran must take a backseat to the contingencies of national security. Therefore, and without reducing the role of international and regional players such as the United States, Russia and Saudi Arabia in destabilizing the Middle East, it is necessary to foreground how the reformist inversion of the strategic relation between Iranian regional and internal security (which Alizadeh here articulates for

the mass media) only works to erase the role of IRI as a neoliberal state and expansionist force in the Middle East region.

On one hand, the inverted reformist narrative promotes a reductive dichotomy between the Iranian state and international threats to its regional hegemony. On the other, it establishes an anti-democratic antagonism between the Iranian state and grassroots movements for radical change inside Iran. Alizadeh and others employ this inversion to suggest that the new round of protests in Iran only advances the agendas of IRI conservatives and Washington neoconservatives, because any form of dissent that projects itself outside the accepted avenues of reformism ultimately undermines Rouhani's reformist-backed presidency. Evidently, the inverted narrative also overrides the agency of subaltern classes to present an alternative to the Iranian middle class's reformist agenda, a strategic and tactical platform that has delivered little in plans and promises in the 22 years of its hegemony over the discourse of political dissent in Iran. The recent protests have highlighted the erasure of the agency of the subaltern Iranian classes through the hegemonic reformist narrative: prior to these events, the IRI regime seemed to be at its peak power and stability, and any challenge to its domestic and regional ambitions appeared as utterly futile.

The new round of protests offers an alternative path for political change inside Iran. The most defining characteristic of this new movement is precisely its differences, in both form and demands, from the majority middle-class, reformist movements that have appeared in recent years. From the Green Movement to the many online and electoral campaigns that promote a mainly liberal agenda, the reformist protests of the past evolved from and revolved around liberal economic and political demands, with an emphasis on nonviolence as a tactic of political dissent. The new protest movement is not only primarily working-class, with demands centered around social and economic justice, but also more defiant, visibly less conciliatory in tone, and equipped with a strongly anti-establishment array of slogans.

Importantly, it is the homegrown and subversive character of the recent wave of protests which defies any simplistic, reductive and disempowering classification of this as an "imported," "co-opted" or "supervised" project of "regime change" devised and navigated by the West and its regional allies. Although the slogans of this movement do, in many instances, openly call for "regime change," these subversive chants for the overthrow of the "clerical hierarchy," as well as the songs which refuse the proffered choice of the reformist/conservative dyad, are different in demands and aspirations from similar expressions found in the political language of exiled opposition and monarchist groups.

The new protest movement's calls for an outside alternative to the options tabled by the reformist/conservative status quo harbours a transformative potential for a third, and more effective, movement for political change in Iran. Its transformative character is evident, first and foremost, in its unwillingness to confine its political options to the political gradations and horizons fixed by the IRI state; these protesters chant, "Conservatives, Reformists, One Way or Another / It's All Over!". Their counternarrative is significant *despite* the Iranian reformists' track record as the more "progressive" and "moderate" faction of the IRI's ruling clique - reformist 'virtues' duly instrumentalized by an Iranian middle-class seeking open dialogue and interaction with the West to advance their class agenda. Antonio Gramsci famously remarks that "appearances are historical necessities." The new protest movement's anti-establishment counternarratives should be interpreted as such "necessary" expressions of a deep divide and disconnect between the Iranian working and middle class movements. These new slogans are rendering all Iranians inescapably aware of deep socioeconomic contradictions within their ranks. No matter the outcome of these protests, the Iranian reformists can no longer claim to represent the political interest and aspiration of all Iranians.

If the growing debate over a “third path” of “transition” from reformism which presently occupies Iranian statesmen, analysts and observers is essentially a concern with the implications of the new protest movement’s political counternarrative, it is because neither the reformist nor the conservative factions of power in Iran can possibly offer a long-term solution to the unequal labour conditions and subsistence issues and demands of the Iranian working-class. The Iranian economy is structurally incapable of catering to these demands in the long run, as we will demonstrate, and the neoliberal exigencies of Iran’s transition to the global markets will only exacerbate the shortcomings that plague the lives of Iranian subaltern classes. It is necessary to situate the political consciousness of Iran’s new protest movement in the context of the Iranian working-class’s long-term view of the economic policies of the IRI state over the past four decades, which have led to the present impasse in Iranian politics.

The IRI’s Violent History of Eliminating Political Alternatives

The IRI has historically confined the limits of the language of political dissent and organization inside Iran to a choice between its own conservative and reformist/centrist political factions. And, despite internecine power struggles between these two factions, which have on occasion led them to conflicts as serious as the contentions over the results of the 2009 elections, in practice and overall strategy these two groups have functioned as a unified clique of power. This clique has ruled Iran since the 1979 revolution and upholds a tacit, but inviolable, inter-factional agreement regarding the “principles of the IRI state” (Ayatollah Khamenei’s favorite terminology).

The ruling IRI clique consolidated its hold over power in the post-revolutionary 1980s by way of eliminating all left, liberal, secular and “Islamist-socialist” (Mujahedin-e Khalq) parties that participated in the 1979 revolution. By the time the Serial Killings of Iranian intellectuals were carried out in 1998, and after the leaders of Iran’s Kurdish Democratic Party were assassinated in Berlin in 1992, all domestic alternatives to the rule of the IRI clique had been exterminated from the post-revolutionary political stage. Nonetheless, the IRI’s template for consolidating power was first cast and put into practice prior to the 1990s, throughout the Iran-Iraq war. In the name of resisting Western imperialism and “paving the road to Al-Quds through [the Iraqi city of] Karbala,” the ruling IRI clique led by Ayatollah Khomeini extended and protracted a largely won and waning war campaign against Saddam Hussein’s retreating army, only to domesticate the military security and ideological imperatives of fighting a war against the US-backed Iraq in order to exterminate all political opposition that threatened the internal security of the Iranian state, thus inaugurating Iran’s notorious and bloody “80s.” This *wage war and rule* strategy would later set the template for the current hegemonic “national security” discourse, which justifies political oppression inside Iran in the name of securing the strategic “Shi’a Crescent” that extends from Iran to Israel through Northern Iraq and central-southern Syria.

However, the post Iran-Iraq war era imposed its own imperatives on the IRI’s economic agenda. Having already nationalized and monopolized revenues from big industries such as oil, and having confiscated the assets of the capitalist class loyal to the Pahlavi regime in the immediate years after 1979, the IRI clique had managed to significantly “bridge” the class divides that it had inherited from the Pahlavi era throughout the early and mid- 1980s. Nevertheless, the high costs of the protracted war campaign and the need to rebuild the state and country after the war were simultaneous to the devastating 1980s oil glut and the drop in the global demand for energy.

The loss in oil revenues, coupled with Khomeini’s sudden death, served to intensify the conflict between two competing interpretations of the IRI’s foundations and its future: the centrist-conservative faction led by the then-president Khamenei and speaker of parliament, Hashemi Rafsanjani, who advanced the cause of the structural adjustment programs of the IMF and the World Bank; and the left-Islamist (now reformist) faction led by figures including the prime minister Mir

Hossein Mousavi, who instead promoted a statist program of economic reform and rejuvenation. In this conflict, the latter camp was ultimately sidelined from power, and the neoliberal phase of the IRI's existence was inaugurated. Significantly, the privatization and deregulation policies carried out under this neoliberal economic regime favoured the economic interests of the ruling power clique and its affiliates, with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which had found its way to political and strategic decision-making power during the Iran-Iraq war, as a primary beneficiary. This change of fortunes would transform the IRGC into a powerbroker of the Iranian economic, military and political spheres over the following decade.

Nonetheless, the conservative faction's economic reform program - officially dubbed "The Reconstruction Era" - was essentially only a continuation of the Pahlavi regime's own development program, one that favoured the expansion of industry and services to the urban metropolises at the expense of under-developing the peripheries and margins of Iranian urban geography. The neoliberal version of the Pahlavi economic agenda pursued by the IRI during the 1980s and 90s produced the same results as in its earlier political incarnation under the Shah: it bloated the urban middle class at the expense of the working and marginalized classes. Ultimately, "The Reconstruction Era" led the country's economy to such a degree of inflation and recession that a first round of working-class revolts erupted in 1992 from the urban and economic peripheries.

This first round of working-class revolts, coupled with the legitimacy crisis that the Iranian state was dealing with as a result of the Mykonos court's revelations and the pressure of Bill Clinton's "D'Amato" round of economic sanctions, forced the conservative faction of the IRI to reinvoke the sidelined reformist faction to a power sharing project aimed at restoring the legitimacy of the IRI state. This feat was accomplished with a landslide vote in the 1997 elections, when Iranians appointed Mohammad Khatami - deemed the "Chief of Reform" - to the office of the president. But this time around, the reformists were only loyal to the neoliberal economic agenda of the ruling IRI clique. And even though the reformist government did allow for controlled expression of criticism within liberal media and culture, the conservative faction remained in firm control of key state institutions such as the Judiciary, the Guardian Council, the IRGC and, most importantly, the office of the Supreme Leader. As a result, Khatami and his reformist faction managed little in the way of critical reforms during their two terms in the president's office; they rarely challenged the conservative factions' monopoly over state power, and even gradually lost ground on the media and cultural reforms that they had initially implemented.

The critical shortcomings of the "Reformist Government" of Mohammad Khatami alienated core demographics of its support base, and particularly its middle-class power base. In the absence of middle-class support, the conservative hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad rode a populist wave of working-class dissatisfaction with the reformists' prolongation of the IRI's neoliberal economic agenda to surpass the reformist candidates in the first round of the 2005 elections. In the second round, a strong "no" vote cast by the working-class against Hashemi Rafsanjani (the reformists' coalition partner at the time) in favour of Ahmadinejad, returned the control of the president's office to the conservative faction.

Proving more strategic in his economic plans for the subaltern classes, Ahmadinejad implemented popular subsidiary, housing and loan policies backed by a sudden upsurge of oil prices in the international markets. Nonetheless, it was ultimately Ahmadinejad's notorious "surgical" cuts to many essential subsidies that inaugurated a new era of austerity politics in Iran that culminated, initially, in the rise and crackdown of the working-class "Bread Revolts." Ahmadinejad's two terms in office were also simultaneous with the inauguration of a notorious era of economic profligacy, corruption and consolidation of capital by the IRI clique, especially the IRGC military-industrial complex, which took advantage of Ahmadinejad's popular mandate to extend its influence to every significant economic and political institution of the IRI.

The fear of Ahmadinejad's corrosive corruption, the dire economic consequences of the US sanctions against Iran's nuclear program, as well as growing concerns over the IRGC's widening influence, mobilized the middle classes to rally around the resurrected reformist-backed candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi, during the 2009 elections. Facing the possibility of a humiliating defeat and - at a critical juncture when the IRI was under international pressure for accelerating the development of its nuclear program - the transfer of power to a more conciliatory reformist "nuclear rhetoric", the conservative faction backing Ahmadinejad hijacked the results of these elections in an organized coup d'état sponsored by the Supreme Leader and the IRGC, and went on to violently suppress the reformist Green Movement that disputed this anti-democratic takeover. Needless to say, the IRI's clique's costly support of Ahmadinejad's hawkish politics, and its increasing belief in the necessity of acquiring nuclear technology as a matter of national security, were only directly correlated with the presence of American forces all around Iranian borders in the post 9/11 era.

Despite mass discontent with the IRI's state apparatuses in the aftermath of revelations about the violent crackdown of Green Movement protesters, in 2013 the Iranian middle class once again voted for the reformist-backed candidate, Hassan Rouhani. This time, it was the crippling and isolating effects of the Obama round of sanctions against Iran's nuclear program, and the plummeting of the oil price as a result of Saudi Arabia's increased production, which sent the Iranian *demos* back to the voting booth. As for the IRI hierarchy, they were already negotiating the foundations of the 2015 nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) in secret via Omani mediation, and appointed Rouhani - Iran's chief negotiator during the initial round of nuclear talks in 2003 - the candidate to bridge a consensus over the seemingly irreconcilable divide between the IRI state and the Iranian nation.

In the meantime, and throughout Ahmadinejad's second term and Rouhani's first, the IRI state media - and many reformist websites and papers - had waged an effective campaign to convince Iranians that US sanctions against the nuclear program were the primary obstacle to improving their deteriorating livelihoods.[1] This propaganda campaign effectively transformed an increasingly subversive disillusionment with the IRI's economic and political record into popular support for the nuclear program as a matter of "national security" and "sovereignty", invoking historical comparisons with Mohammad Mossadegh's Pahlavi-era decolonization of the oil industry in the reformist media. If Iran's economy were to improve, the Iranian people were convinced that they would have to fully support the IRI throughout the bargaining process with the Americans. In the process, the IRI also manufactured the expectation that, with the end of economic sanctions against its nuclear program, the economic situation of the country would also drastically improve. Though the dismal effects of the US sanctions on the lives of Iranians cannot be undermined, it was the IRI's media campaign that galvanized legitimate sentiments against these sanctions into support for Iran's nuclear program and regional ambitions.

This domestic media campaign was twinned with a foreign policy strategy that ultimately forced America's hand during the nuclear negotiations. Obama's "Shift to the Pacific", the decisive interventions in Syria and Crimea by Russia, Iran's ally, the rise of ISIS, an ineffective US foreign policy in Iraq and the Gulf states (which had handed Iraq over to Iranian control and spread IRI influence in the mainly Shi'ite nations of Bahrain and Yemen) and finally the upheavals of the Arab Spring movements in northern Africa, had altogether destabilized the established balance of power in the Middle East and jeopardized American control over strategic waterways in the Black, Mediterranean, Oman and Red Seas that were essential to the movements of its navy and the flow of oil to international markets. Throughout this strategic shift, Iran's unilateral support for the Assad government in the form of intelligence and policing aid had led an initially peaceful Syrian protest movement down the path of the current civil war. The IRI tactics went even as far as transferring Al-Qaeda leaders held captive in Iran to Syria, all in order to "radicalize" the protest movement and

justify Assad's crackdown against Syrian opposition. The IRI therefore kept the Shi'ite crescent intact by maintaining its vital and threatening access to Israel via Lebanon's Hezbollah; Assad-controlled regions of Syria; and, during Iraq's civil war, Baghdad-controlled areas of Iraq. Moreover, the IRI's orchestrations in Syria helped nurture the violent spectre of ISIS as a straw man with which to frighten the residents of both the Middle East and the West into cynicism and submission - a feat accomplished only with the help of other regional powers that pursued their own political ends in Syria, as well as, critically, the regional and global backlash against a violent history of Western imperialism in the region.

The stark 'success' of the IRI's strategy affirmed the status of Iran as an "island of stability in the region" (Alizadeh's popular reappropriation of Carter's terminology) and rallied popular support for its "national security" campaign, forcing the US government into a tactical checkmate: having already conceded part of its control over the Middle East, the Americans now had to resign themselves to the new status of Iran as a legitimate nation-state and unacknowledged regional partner. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action of 2015 soon followed, because the continuation of the Iran - US dynamic of hostilities was no longer plausible in its traditional forms and rhetoric.

Having effectively set its strategic depth and borders outside Iran and across state lines in the region, not only had the IRI secured its bargaining rights over the nuclear deal and pushed back against US sanctions, but it also appeared for a time (prior to the new round of protests) that the IRI had finally established and consolidated itself as the legitimate, rightful representative of the Iranian people. With the success of Iran's regional project, it was also inevitable that the likes of the security discourse expressed by Alizadeh would be utilized by the IRI regime and its reformist intellectuals as a tactical and ideological measure against those expressions of dissent inside Iran that threaten the IRI hierarchy and the 'stability' this regime provides for Iranians through its policing of the Middle East region. In this hegemonic security discourse, the reformists are then framed as the "rational" and "moderate" faction of Iranian politics that can secure both the IRI's regional and international ambitions, without risking the economic and political costs incurred by hardliners such as Ahmadinejad.

Naturally, Iran's renewed access to global markets secured through the nuclear deal could only materialize through further deregulation and neoliberalization of the labour and finance markets inside the country. A welcome prospect for many middle class Iranians who sought renewed ties to the West after years of international isolation, Rouhani's campaign promises of rejuvenating the post-sanction Iranian economy and international image - such as lowering the inflation rate to "below 25%," raising the "minimum wage," and "improving bilateral ties" with regional actors such as Saudi Arabia - secured a second term in office for him in 2017. But, having already weathered the storms of the nuclear sanctions and the wars in the Middle East, the two factions of the IRI's ruling clique waged a vicious election campaign against each other prior to Rouhani's landslide win. With a bounty of new economic deals with Europe and the rest of the world at stake in this runoff, the reformists and conservatives aired each other's dirty laundry during presidential debates live-streamed on Iranian State TV, exposing the Iranian public to a disillusioning array of scandalous, corrupt and nepotistic practices by both sides.

Last month, in order to justify cutting subsidies on foodstuff and petrol, Rouhani's team leaked an overlooked component of his government's budget. The list of offices, institutions and religious, military and paramilitary persons and organizations connected to the office of the Supreme Leader and the IRGC - all of whom pocket a large segment of Iran's annual budget - provoked a wide wave of popular discontent with the direction and policies of his government that swept the print and online media landscape. The timing of this leak was critical to the events that followed: over the course of the months leading up to the new protest movement in Iran, close to a thousand protests and strikes had been staged all over the country by various labour and retiree unions who were

disenfranchised by the economic policies of the Rouhani government, as well as by ordinary citizens who had lost their life savings to fraudulent or bankrupt financial institutions. The climate of domestic public opinion about the IRI was ripe for an abrupt shift.

Retaliating against Rouhani's leak, a hardline cleric connected to the conservative factions reportedly staged a protest in the city of Mashhad to underline Rouhani's poor track record with the poor, and further undermine the reformists' flagging reputation with the subaltern classes. Staged against a background of dissatisfaction and impatience with the slow pace of economic recovery after the lifting of US sanctions - an expectation formed by IRI's own propaganda during the nuclear negotiations - the events in Mashhad quickly triggered rounds of working-class protests all over Iran that lasted several days and spread to more than ninety cities.

As expected, protests were carried out in the margins and cities peripheral to Iranian urban centres, and their central rallying cry of "Bread, Work, Freedom!" has translated the marginalized Iranians' economic concerns into an emergent political program. Interestingly, when these protesters vandalized public and private property, their targets consisted of venues which were symbolic of the IRI's state power, such as patrols of Basij (an IRGC-affiliated paramilitary organization), banks and offices of the Supreme Leader's clerical representatives in their cities. So far, more than twenty protesters have been reported killed, and close to a thousand more are believed to be in prisons and detention centres all over Iran. To brand this movement as simply a "plot" orchestrated by the Saudis, the West or the Iranian conservatives against the Rouhani government only erases the wider and recent histories that inform the political spirit and demands of these protesters.

The Necessity of a Third Path to Political Change

In a live interview with Vahid Yaminpour, an Iranian state TV host and IRGC affiliate, Alizadeh spoke from London, England, to stress the need to recognize and "manage" the legitimate anti-corruption demands of the working class, only to then suggest that the radical and anti-establishment overtones and slogans of this movement had to be repressed, for "any riot" in England or the US deserves this fate. Echoing this mindset, some leftist, postcolonial and pro-reformist Iranian academics inside and outside Iran have equally undermined the new protest movement by reducing its political demands to "diffuse" expressions of ideological or purely economic "grievances." Critically, these commentators erase these protesters' deep consciousness of their treatment by the IRI, a long history from which their new movement draws its radical aspirations.

Marxist and postcolonial commentators on Iranian politics should instead focus on countering the right-wing and orientalist narratives offered by Western policymakers and the mass media, without overlooking the many critical nuances of political developments inside Iran. In overemphasizing the role of the United States and other global actors in shaping the economic hardships endured by Iranians - which also underestimates the aforementioned histories of the plundering and brutalizing of the Iranian subaltern classes by the Iranian ruling clique - these leftist, postcolonial and reformist commentators risk complicity in reproducing the very conditions of suffering denounced by Iranian protesters.

In the name of reconciliation with the West and the global markets, the reformist Iranian middle class has been likewise complicit in Rouhani's economic policies and the IRI's expansionist agenda in the Middle East. In instigating market reforms and subsidy cuts, Rouhani's policies have only jeopardized the livelihood of working class Iranians. In a climate of dissent, where many of the leaders of the working class movement are in prison for charges of "acting against national security" and Rouhani's popular foreign minister repeats that "there are no political prisoners in Iran," the Iranian working class is now articulating its own distinct social movement in order to distinguish its demands from the middle class support for the IRI's overall agenda; their new protest loudly chants,

“Leave Syria Alone / Do Something for One of Your Own!”

Reformist commentators may very well argue that it is the heavy presence of anti-riot forces and machinery in the capital and major urban centers, and the recent painful memory of the Green Movement crackdown, which has prevented the middle class from joining their fellow working class Iranians. They also highlight how the heavy presence of the IRI task force in the center has left its disciplinary organs in the peripheries thin and under-equipped, thus allowing the new working class movement to fill the power void. But regardless of how the Iranian middle classes choose to heed the chants of their fellow working class Iranians - “Don’t just observe us from up there/ Come and join us down here!” - the Iranian people as a whole know well enough that the radical economic and political character of the recent protests is rooted mainly in the long-standing and cumulative discontent of subaltern classes from the margins, and that their anger is the expression of a deep discontent with the entirety of the ruling clique and its capitalist, authoritarian and expansionist rule over many years.

The political aspirations behind the economic slogans of the new protest movement are directed at the IRI’s economic corruption and political repression. However, outside the heavily moderated presidential elections and the choice between reformists and conservatives, there are no other established venues for democratic dissent within the Iranian political space. Neither will the IRI tolerate any political education and organization outside the reach of its own state apparatus, leaving the Iranian working class with a lacking, or poorly-equipped, language of dissent. The question of transition from reformism must therefore contend with three future possibilities, the first two of which will not bring these groups any nearer to their aims and demands, namely, that the new protest movement may fall prey to the populist promises and plans of the likes of Ahmadinejad once more, or that the classes behind this movement may risk other rounds of protests in the future only to risk even more arrests and killings. But there is also a third possibility, that of transforming the new protest movement’s class consciousness into a radical platform for political change in Iran. The stakes for such a practice are high, and the strategic field for its implementation is mined and muddied with danger, but the tactics of Dual Power and Democratic Confederalism are proven possibilities in the Middle Eastern political scene and could very well form the strategy for this radical political transition.

The Iranian middle class voted for Rouhani just four years after the Green Movement, despite his collusion with the state oppressors at the height of the crackdowns, and there is no guarantee that, in the absence of a political alternative, the middle class will not empower the reformists, its traditional representative in Iranian politics, once again. What is more, the structural and political deficits that characterize the dichotomies of Iranian politics are only symptomatic of a late capitalist milieu of confinement to what we might term the “Clintonite”-“Trumpist” dyad, which currently haunts neoliberal politics from the US, to France and Japan. The Iranian people would do well to articulate their own transition out of this international impasse, toward an egalitarian principle of democratic self-governance and international politics.

[1] For example, the ban against medicine - one of the most unpopular items on the US sanctions list - was not on the US Treasury’s official list of sanctions against Iran. Controversial revelations by Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, Ahmadinejad’s health minister, regarding the IRGC’s ‘mismanagement’ of funds earmarked for medicinal supplies from abroad, were followed (after her removal) by Seyed Hassan Ghazizadeh Hashemi’s concession that “The medicine problem is caused by ourselves, it is not related to sanctions at all.” The Iranian public had been led to believe that the drug shortages were mainly due to the US sanctions.

This article was first published in *New Socialist*.

**Fouad Oveysy is a PhD student in Critical Theory and Comparative Literature at University of California, Irvine. His research is broadly focused on the intersections between realpolitik and critical theory and, in specific, on the role of post-revolutionary literatures that shaped the historical space of the modern and pre-modern Iranian state.*

**Behnam Amini is a PhD student at York University, Toronto in the program of Social and Political Thought. His research is mainly focused on democratic theory, the Kurdish question and decolonization.*