

A Restatement of Akbar Ganji's Manifesto

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When the night has been too lonely
And the road has been too long
That you think that love is only
For the lucky and the strong
Just remember in the winter
Far beneath the bitter snows
Lies the seed that with the sun's love
In the spring becomes the rose

From Bette Midler's song "The Rose"

Publication of Akbar Ganji's manifesto was an important event on the political scene of Iran, as testified by its enthusiastic reception by Iranians within and outside Iran. Ganji is both eloquent and forceful in his writing, and one may question the need for a restatement of his manifesto. I have three reasons for taking on this task. First, Ganji's manifesto leaves out some important building blocks of the future society and economy of Iran. Furthermore, definitions of many terms and concepts have been left to the imagination of the reader, and this vagueness has been the source of many problems in the past hundred years history of Iran. More important, Ganji is still devoted to the illusions of the youth of the 1979 revolution. He tries to justify his position with reference to Khomeini's statements and proclamations. Yet, all the problems that Iranians are suffering today can be directly traced to Khomeini and his ideas. If there is to be a dawn at the end of this dark night engulfing Iran and Iranians, there needs to be a clean break with the present-day political, economic, and social order. In particular, the constitution has to change.

Foundations

The new constitution should be based on the following principles, but more importantly, a national consensus should be built around them:

- Democracy and human rights
- Separation of religion and state
- Sanctity of private property
- An economy based on the operation of markets
- A commitment to science, technology, and rational thinking

These principles are interdependent, and therefore one cannot be adopted without the others. They reinforce and support one another, and if one of them is left out of the equation, the others will not function and will not survive.

Democracy and Human Rights

Even though Iranians have been seeking democracy in one form or another over the past hundred years, it is difficult to find a lucid description of this concept in Persian. Not only do many ordinary citizens have misconceptions about the subject, but many so-called leaders and intellectuals have been confused and propagated false notions about it. Witness all the nonsense about religious democracy, or adding the adjective of Western to democracy as if there were an Eastern democracy. A more telling case is the recent events in Iraq. It is claimed that the majority are Shiite and may vote for an Islamic government á la Iran. It is asked what the United States would do in such an eventuality. Would it go back on its promise of democracy? Even the elites confuse the tyranny of the majority with democracy. If anything, far from giving carte blanche to the majority, democracy is the protection of the rights of minorities.

Democracy starts with the sanctity and centrality of individual human beings and their rights, and then prescribes ways in which they can live together. Thus, every individual has certain rights that are inalienable and cannot be encroached upon except under rare circumstances prescribed by law. These rights are enshrined in a bill of rights, which form the constitution, that is, a contract by which people will live together. These rights are mostly those that do not harm anyone else. Therefore, no one including the majority can take them away. They include freedom of speech, freedom of religion and worship, right to association, right to privacy, right to pursue a profession, and so on. These are the essence of democracy and guarantee its existence. Therefore, phrases like “religious democracy” are meaningless. Most important among these rights is equality before the law regardless of gender, race, religion, profession, wealth, etc. No one for any reason, least of all for the garb of religion, is above the law. No one can make decisions for others even if he calls himself “Ayatollah” (Manifestation of God) since God need no representative.

Human rights are neither relative nor culture bound; they are absolute. As Mehrangiz Kar, the Iranian human rights activist and lawyer has pointed out, dictators, religious or otherwise, have used excuses such as cultural differences to justify the subjugation of women and denial of human rights to their people. Even if a backward culture prescribes discrimination against women or torture of prisoners, the remedy is to abandon the decadent culture, not to give up on human rights.

There are other rights whose enjoyment may bring people into conflict. To resolve any potential conflict, machinery, namely, the government is set up. To carry out its duties, the government will be the only institution with the right to use force, which could potentially cause many problems. Therefore, the government has to be as small as possible. It is a necessary poison that has to be administered at the minimum dosage. Moreover, there has to be checks and balances at every stage. This brings out the second main feature of democracy: the power to govern belongs to people. At any moment they can hire certain individuals to run the machinery of government. These government officials are servants of people, the people elect them, no one has a decree from God, and no one will be prosecuted because he/she insulted a government official. In a democracy, no one will be the great leader, the guardian of the realm, and no large picture of anyone will be hoisted on buildings. Most important, the government must function within the constitution, which sets limits on its conduct.

But democracy has another requirement that Iranians typically have shown little aptitude for. It is an attitude. Every individual has to accept that he does not have a

monopoly on truth and on the right path. All persons should show tolerance for opposite views. If someone disagrees with me he is not necessarily an infidel, foreign agent, or traitor. It is not acceptable for the majority, let alone the minority, to insist that either my candidate will become the prime minister or else I will frustrate the work of the parliament. Tolerance and compromise are prerequisites of democracy. A nation of mini-dictators, each already knowing what is good for the nation, cannot have democracy.

What can democracy deliver? More important, what can it not deliver? Democracy does not guarantee that all decisions at all times will be the right ones, that everyone will be happy, or that the nation will have no problems. No such promises are made. But democracy guarantees that the government will make far fewer mistakes in its conduct than any other system of government. It guarantees that, in the long run a nation with a democratic system is far ahead of nations with dictatorship, benevolent or otherwise. Those who claim that they know the right path and can avoid the pitfalls of democracy, and those who claim that they have found the road to salvation in the Qur'an, the Bible, or in any other book, are simply charlatans and con artists. If there are any doubts about the veracity of the last statement in the past, the events of the last 24 years in Iran and the last two centuries in the Middle East should dispel them.

Separation of Religion and State

Separation of religion and state is a consequence of the sanctity of the individual and the fact that the collective will of the people is the source of governmental authority. Therefore, no religion and no religious law can be imposed on the people. First, not all people are of the same religion, and even when the majority are followers of the same faith, as in Iran where the majority are Shiite Muslims, there are many sub-branches of the main religion; each individual can hold a different interpretation of the edicts.

Separation of religion and state does not imply an irreligious society. The United States government is built on the idea of the separation of church and state, yet religion occupies a significant place in American life. Believing in God and voluntarily obeying what the faithful believe are His orders are not incompatible with democracy. But, religions that ask their adherents to submit to a human authority, be it a priest or a molla, and impose edicts as interpreted by this authority on all people, are incompatible with democracy. In this sense, Islam has lingered in the long-gone past and has become a source of problems for Muslims. It is like software that has not been updated for 1400 years.

In a democratic society each individual is free to worship as he or she pleases but may not encroach on the rights of the others. In voting, an individual may indeed follow his or her religious beliefs. But the whole process is voluntary and no force is applied or implied. Religion remains strictly a private matter banned from the political arena.

Property Rights and Market Economy

Sanctity of private property is a prerequisite of democracy. First, historically no country where private property has not been respected has had a democracy. Indeed, present-day democracies all have a capitalist system. Second, when the government is the sole employer or by far the largest employer, it would be very difficult and dangerous for anyone to raise his or her voice against it and against its mismanagement. Everyone's livelihood is in the hands of the government, and whoever wants to live in relative peace

had best keep quiet. The seven-decade history of the former Soviet Union is a testimony to this fact. Not all individuals are superheroes and can tolerate gulags. The overwhelming majority of people want to live in freedom and pursue happiness. Sanctity of private property affords them this pleasure.

In a country where almost all employment is provided by the government or is in some way dependent on it, an honest official who has not accumulated wealth through illicit means cannot afford to stand up to the powers-that-be and criticize government policies. His or her livelihood depends on retaining the job. But in a country with a thriving private sector the opposite is true: a competent manager or professional cannot wait to get out of the government and earn much more in the private sector. Paul Volcker, the former chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, or Dick Cheney, the current Vice President of the United States, could earn many times more in the private sector than in government. They are not demeaned by the necessity of hanging on to their positions. Martin Feldstein, the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under President Reagan, was able to publicly criticize the administration's economic policies and resign. He went back to his teaching job at Harvard. On the other hand, in poor nations not only is the presidency for life and sometimes inherited by an offspring of a defunct ruler, but even lesser officials cling to their seats for dear life. If a change occurs it is often only a reshuffling of positions among the same ruling clique.

Perhaps if this note had been written 30 years ago, I would have needed to defend the idea of a market economy. However, the events of the last 13 years—particularly the demise of the former Soviet Union and disintegration of its Eastern European empire, and what we now know about the backwardness of these countries under the yoke of their socialist regimes—have rendered such a defense superfluous. A market economy is powerful machinery for the efficient allocation of resources and creation of the maximum output for a nation. Equally important, a market economy encourages and rewards inventions and innovations that benefit the society and humankind. Government tampering with the Iranian economy over the past quarter century has maximized the misery of Iranians. Iran has a high inflation rate and a high unemployment rate even among the highly educated, and its per capita income is still below what it was during the last years of the previous regime.

The mainstay of the economy, the engine of growth, and the source of job creation should be the private sector. The government's role is to maintain an environment in which each individual would be able to pursue his or her goal of material well-being. This in turn requires that the government establish a legal framework in which property rights can be enforced and markets can function smoothly. The function of markets is to coordinate the dispersed and diverse activities of individuals and businesses toward an optimal outcome. One may also argue that a market economy is the application of the principle of democracy to the realm of the economy. In the political arena democracy allows ideas to compete, and through a process of trial and error society chooses the best. Similarly, markets allow all goods and services, as well as intellectual products, to compete and the society to choose what it considers the best. In both cases there is a process of trial and error to find the optimal outcome.

True, some individuals because of their physical or mental challenges, because of bad choices, bad luck, or the ups and downs of the economy may require societal assistance. Indeed, it is a prime duty of modern-day governments to provide such persons

with a safety net. Nevertheless, such a net should not interfere with the efficient working of the market. Ideas such as wage and price controls have been tested all around the world and have failed. Neither should the net be an instrument for encouraging delinquency or a setup for corruption.

Science and Technology

The reader may think that this section is superfluous. After all, Persian books and articles and the proclamations of government officials in Iran are full of praise for the sciences. The reader may also be able to quote a verse or two from the Qur'an or Persian classical literature in support of the sciences. Weren't Avicenna, Farabi, and Khayyam all Iranians? If so, I would like to ask the reader why, in the past four centuries no great mathematician, physicist, chemist, biologist, or economist has been able to work in Iran, and indeed, in the whole Islamic world. The fact of the matter is that, despite the proclamations of love for science, the Islamic world has shunned science and mistreated scientists. Many have decided to pursue other lines of work, and those who were able have fled to the West.

The first requirement of science is freedom of speech. In the past four centuries no Islamic country has enjoyed freedom of speech, and governments have tried to stifle freethinking. The prosecutor's indictment of Abdollah Nouri, the former Interior Minister of Iran (and incidentally a disciple of Khomeini) noted that the totality of Nouri's writings had the stench of conspiracy!

Freedom is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the progress of the sciences. The society and the government should also believe in and actively support a science establishment. Those who are able and willing should be able to pursue the profession of science and make a living at it. The scientific establishment requires material support, which, in advanced countries both the government and private sector have a share in providing. The funding of the scientific establishment furnishes science workers with the peace of mind and the necessary tools to expand knowledge. The return to society comes in the form of trained professionals with up-to-date knowledge of their profession; direct help to business and government in the form of consultation, inventions and innovations; and the spread of enlightenment and scientific thinking to the whole society. The idea that science is something apart from the economy and society and that the scientist is some strange fellow living in poverty is preposterous. Even if such were true in the past, such idea has no place in the 21st century.

Another necessary ingredient for the progress of science is the attitude of people. Unfortunately, most Iranians are still misinformed about science. Many still think that they can find novel scientific ideas if not the whole essence of science in the pages of ancient books. How else can one explain the claims of persons like Sahriati, who discovered socialism in early Islam, and Banisadr, who discovered economic principles in the Qur'an and other religious writings? How else can one explain the late Ayatollah Beheshti's advice to one of his followers that he should look into prayer books for solutions to social and economic problems?

On that same note, I should also like to put an end to the bragging about the glorious past so many Muslims are fond of. The modern science, the real science, started 450 years ago. At that time, the Islamic world decided to shun science and scientific work and became enthralled with superstition. As a result, no Moslem has made any significant

contribution to modern science in the past 450 years. If there have been some minor figures from Islamic countries, they are only those who studied and worked in the West. Iranians and Muslims are fond of noting that, until recently Avicenna's books were taught in European and American universities. First, they were never taught in American universities. As to European universities it is true that his book on medicine, *Hekmat*, was a textbook until the 16th century. But that is not the recent past. The Greek knowledge found its way to the Islamic world, where men like Avicenna, Farabi and others added to it. During the Middle Ages, Christian monks brought the books of Islamic scholars to Europe. But when the era of the new science started all such books had to be thrown away. Modern science is based on observation, experimentation, statistics, and mathematics.

Rational Thinking

A short note on rational thinking is in order because perhaps it is easily the most misunderstood concept. Rationality does not imply that everyone has to be a logician or have a Ph.D. in mathematics or economics. Rather there are three ingredients to rational thinking. The first is to see the world the way it is rather than as we hope it is or should be. This may sound like a banal statement, a truism that need not be mentioned. Unfortunately, it is not so. Witness all the Iranians who, without knowing the first thing about American foreign policy, the Arab-Israeli conflict, or IMF policies, yet, given the opportunity, will expound on the topic for hours. Witness all the Iranians who, like "Uncle Napoleon" are familiar with the intimate workings of the U.S. State Department, the CIA, and the MI6. Whatever we think and wish, there is a real world out there. Any statement about it should be based on observation, documentation, experiment, and statistics. This is one reason why the whole nonsense of postmodernism is a poison for societies like Iran. In his imaginary world, the head of the Iranian Judiciary, Mahmood Shahrudi, with no evidence, claimed that many countries in the world are studying the Iranian legal system to emulate it. And President Mohammad Khatami claimed that elections of local councils in Iran have been a landmark and have had great impact not only in Iran, but on the whole world. Both gentlemen seem to be postmodernists through and through.

Second, any description or picture of the world, either physical or social, should be internally consistent; that is, one part of a statement should not be in conflict with another part. Nor should a description of events or an argument require a suspension of disbelief. Many things have been said about truth—that it may set us free, or it will triumph—but only one fact about truth is incontrovertible: truth is consistent. One lie leads to another, and the whole arguments crumble. No amount of fudging or proclamation that "believe it or not it happened this way" can cover up the inconsistencies. In his memoirs, Ayatollah Montazeri claimed that, one year he conducted a prayer for rain that resulted in considerable precipitation. But the Ayatollah does not clarify why, in a dry country like Iran, he did not say the prayer every year.

The most important requirement of rational thinking, however, is that a nation looks at all feasible options and chooses the one it likes the most. Statements that start with "if" and describe a situation that has not happened or will never happen are meaningless. Consider the present day situation in Iraq. Many so-called intellectuals of Middle Eastern origin are critical of the United States. Indeed, they are afraid that the

United States may succeed. But let us ask what are the options if the United States fails. Suppose tomorrow the President decides to pull the American forces out of Iraq. What would happen to Iraq? The least would be a disintegration of that country. Is this what the so-called intellectuals are hoping for? If not, what is the scenario they are envisaging? Some claim that the intention of the United States is not to help Iraqis and that is why they oppose the liberation of Iraq. By the same token, ought we not eat the fruit of a tree because the tree did not bear the fruit with the intention of our eating it? Or ought we not use the services of a telephone company because it intended to make a profit rather than make our communication easier?

A Final Word

The elements of a thriving society outlined above are not a concoction of the imagination of Ganji or this author. One has simply to look around the world to find that there are two types of countries: First, the prosperous and strong; and second, the poor and weak. Unfortunately, Iran and all Islamic countries are in the second category. Closer inspection shows that all countries in the first group are democratic and have a capitalist system, and a science and technology establishment. In the second group, we find dictatorship, government domination of the economy, and a disdain for science. The ramifications are straightforward. If Iran and other Islamic countries want to join the 21st century they must follow in the path of the successful countries. Incidentally, here lies the importance of the liberation of Iraq. The success of the United States in transforming Iraq into a democratic and prosperous country would set the stage for the transformation of the Middle East.

It is important to bear in mind that the building blocks of a modern society alluded to above are not independent of each other, and, therefore, a nation cannot pick and choose. A science establishment will not flourish in a dictatorship, and technological progress would not permeate an economy without functioning markets. They are elements of a jigsaw puzzle: they fit and reinforce each other.

The path to prosperity and strength is clear but a nation has to decide to follow it; and here lies the responsibility of intellectuals. Many Iranian intellectuals have decided to follow the crowd and, on occasions, have catered to the basest traits among Iranians to appeal to masses and find fame. Al-e-Ahmad, Khomeini, Shariati, Banisadr, and Soroush fall in this category. All of them were ignorant of Western sciences and intellectual achievements and relied on fantasies about past glories and hidden treasures in old texts to hoodwink the unsuspecting masses. Since they were not saying anything of substance they wrote volumes. Erroneous ideas were propagated among Iranians—“Westoxication,” “Godly economy,” “religious democracy,” and worst of all the idea that an ancient book, religious or otherwise, may contain the road map to salvation. Intellectuals who went ahead of the nation and tried to illuminate the way were few and far between: Mirza Malkum Khan, Seyyed Jamaledin Asadabadi, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, Kasravi, and now Akbar Ganji and Hashem Aqajari. Some paid for their independent thinking with their lives. Ganji and Aqajari are in prison and enduring physical and psychological torture. The least Iranian intellectuals could do is to lend them moral support.

No matter how lonely is the night and how long is the road, the dawn of democracy in Iran is not far away. I hope when that day arrives both Ganji and Aqajari

are alive and well, or else the privileged souls of that era should build a monument to those who illuminated the road.

Discussions

Misagh Parsa

This is a highly ideologically charged paper. It may be good for the reformist camp, but as an academic paper, it needs to change somewhat.

First, at times the language is too un-academic. For example, on page 2, it says, "Witness all the nonsense about religious democracy." On page 3, the paper uses the term "charlatan" and "con artists." On page 8, the paper lumps a large number of writers and notes that "since they were not saying anything of substance they wrote volumes."

In my view, the language is not appropriate and can improve.

The author puts a great deal of faith in market economy, without noting the role of the state in all successful examples of development (outside of England, including the United States). States played important roles in the development of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore.

Not all-state interventions have been unproductive.

On the other hand, the introduction of greater market forces in the developing world has resulted in the deterioration of economic conditions in many countries. In fact, according to UN data, the standard of living in 57 countries in 2001 declined below their levels in 1991.

Although state enterprises have been very inefficient in many countries, especially in Iran, market fundamentalism may also generate problems.

On the issue of science and technology, it serves no good purpose to deny the contribution of Persian, Arabic, and Islamic advances. While some may exaggerate these contributions, this paper attempts to undermine their influence.

It might help to remember that Arnold Toynbee, not a Persian or a Moslem, has noted that the foundation of Western civilization is the Islamic civilization.

The last paragraph in this paper needs revision. It is not exactly a scholarly statement.

Kamran Dadkhah

Thank you for reading the paper and commenting on it. Your main point is that it is not an academic paper. I did not intend to write an academic paper. The title says it all. It is a (not the) restatement of Ganji's manifesto. He did not write an academic paper neither did I.

Regarding the contributions of Muslims, please read the last paragraph of the section on science and technology. I am talking about the last 450 years.

As to the balance between government and market, I suggested a market-based economy. Government has a role to play, and I discussed that. It is interesting that not only Ganji, but also the majority of economists in Iran as well as the majority of government technocrats agree with this view. Still consider two questions. First, is there a country, which would like to switch to the state controlled economic model of the former Soviet Union and its satellites? Second, consider the case of Iran, where the economy is

more than 70% in the control of government or semi-governmental organizations. Do you suggest that a move toward market economy would be detrimental to the well being of Iranians?

Again thank you for your comments.

Hamid Elyassi

Dr. Kamran Dadkhah uses Akbar Ganji's manifesto as the cue to issue a persuasive statement on the essence and prerequisites of democratic government and the impediments to the development of democracy within the context of the Islamic Republic. In particular, his drawing of the readers' attention to attempts at deflecting public demand for freedom by introducing such aberrations as the notion of "Islamic democracy," so reminiscent of "socialist democracies" of the former Soviet bloc, is significant. I am also grateful for his exposing the fallacious argument that religious devotion is incompatible with political freedom, which incidentally, forces the Iranian intellectuals into the absurd position of defending the religion, as a component of the unifying culture of the Iranian nation, against its exploitation by sections of the clerical establishment.

Dadkhah's analysis, however, stops short of addressing the begging question as how to overcome the mental obstacles to democratization in Iran and convince not only the people, but also their rulers, that democracy would better serve their individual and collective interests. Before the Islamic Revolution, the Iranians, effectively barred from meaningful participation in the political process, had no opportunity to learn and exercise their democratic rights. And under the Islamic Republic, systematic suppression of the democratic aspiration of the people has formed the cornerstone of the declared ideology of the state.

As regards Akbar Ganji's manifesto, there is no questioning the flaws in his argument, as Kamran Dadkhah points out. But perhaps Mr. Ganji deserves greater understanding. As a young devotee of the Islamic Republic, Ganji's social standing and political personality were shaped in a period of political hysteria and unprecedented information blackout in Iran. Notwithstanding his acceptance of the Islamic Republic as the embodiment of the nation's political aspirations, his declared disenchantment with harsher aspects of the regime is a tribute to an inquiring mind struggling to break out of the confines of dogmatic indoctrination. Besides, with the demonstrable failure of the Reform Movement, for the defence of which he has paid such a heavy price, it is not certain that today he would not agree with much of Dr. Dadkhah's criticism.

Kamran Dadkhah

Thank you for your comments. You make two points; I agree with both of them. First, an important question is how to make Iranians, including those in power, cognizant of the fact that in the long run, democracy is the best option for all. After all, even if the lesson of the former Soviet Union is forgotten, the image of Saddam Hossein creeping out of his hole and being examined for lice is still vivid. It seems to me that, since World War II, Iranians have been bombarded with false ideas. Therefore, the answer lies in countering all these years of brainwashing. My admiration for Ganji stems from the fact that he is the first among popular writers to raise the important issues of democracy and market economy and reject cultural relativism.

On the second point, I did not mean to criticize Ganji. He is a brave man in a real and profound sense. He has been brave enough to see the folly of his youth and to face up to it. He has been brave enough to endure years of physical and psychological torture. In this regard, Mohsen Sazgara's interview with the BBC is quite instructive. In particular he noted the naiveté of revolutionaries in the 1970s and the reformists in the 1990s. More important, for what he and his generation have done, he apologized to the next generation.

Ali Akbar Mahdi

1. Since the article takes Akbar Ganji's "Manifeste Jomhourikhaahi" ("A Manifesto for Republicanism") to task and its title includes Akbar Ganji's name, it would have been better to provide English readers with a brief outline of this Manifesto and the context within which this work was written and published. Written in prison, "A Manifesto for Republicanism" is subtitled "Republicanism vs. Constitutionalism: A Model for Breaking out of Political Deadlock." It was leaked out of prison and published first on the net and later underground in the form of pamphlets in Iran. It is a hurried political commentary by a revolutionary who realizes the limitations of the model that he has followed and preached. As such, it is a political statement and reflection. Its cursory economic judgments do not qualify it for the focused economic criticism presented by Professor Dadkhah. The piece is political, and Dadkhah's economic commentary on it, while relevant and related to the topic in some way, is misplaced.
2. Professor Dadkhah's passionate representation of a typical ideal democratic condition is praiseworthy and helpful in understanding some of the basic prerequisites of democratic development. However, not all societies become democratic by passing through the same channel, even though the destination may be the same. In addition, the real democratic conditions in countries known as "democratic" deviate considerably from the conditions described by Dadkhah. Do "every [American] individual accepts that he/she does not have a monopoly on truth and on the right path"? Does President Bush accept this? Or Mr. Rumsfeld? Don't many Americans, Italians, Canadians "claim that they have found the road to salvation in the Bible"? If so, should we call them all "charlatans and con artists"? Why should a Muslim's claim to truth be treated differently than the claims of these Western believers?

What is really disturbing about Dadkhah's generalizations and over-reactions to the Muslim view of truth is that he offers millions of Muslims around the world little hope for ever achieving democracy in their countries, unless they give up Islam! One does not need to agree with the Muslim intellectual view of democracy to persuade Muslims to live more democratically and tolerate their fellow citizens of other faiths. Surely, there are not too many compelling examples of Muslim democratic countries around. However, can one equate the Islamic Republic of Iran with Indonesia or Turkey? Did Western countries overcome their religious fundamentalist forces overnight? Social change is not a commodity to be acquired overnight! Historical processes take time, social forces need to consume their energies, and processes have to exhaust their potentials. A broader perspective on Iranian history would go a long way toward

understanding the forces that have shaped its 20th century history and how it will shape up its future in the 21st century.

3. Professor Dadkhah implies that the US invasion of Iraq was a rational behavior (Dadkhah's criteria: consistency, optional feasibility, realism) and "the success of the United States in transforming Iraq into a democratic and prosperous country would set the stage for the transformation of the Middle East." I do not think that any reasonable person wishing Iraqi people well can hope otherwise. However, the following preceded the above sentence: "If Iran and other Islamic countries want to join the twenty-first century, they must follow in the path of the successful countries. Incidentally, here lies the importance of the liberation of Iraq." What does Professor Dadkhah want to imply? That Iran deserves an invasion by a successful country? Or that the United States knows what is the best course of political and economic development for Iran? I really am not sure what is intended here.
4. Professor Dadkhah divides the world into "the prosperous and strong, and the poor and weak" and assigns democracy, capitalism, technology, and science to the first; and dictatorship, state control of economy, and "a disdain for science" to the latter. Such a categorization may have some heuristic value at the common-sense level of analysis, but it fails to scientifically depict the complicated nature of the realities of modern world. Isn't there any poor capitalist country in this world? Do all people in all poor countries really disdain science? Are all prosperous countries democratic? Are only state run economies poor? Is there a scientific correlation among poverty, state control of economy, and disdain for science? How would one categorize Singapore? China? Brazil? Poland? Czech Republic?
5. Professor Dadkhah lumps many people of different background, knowledge, and stature together without consideration for consistency. "Ale Ahmad, Khomeini, Shariati, Banisadr, and Soroush" are all Muslims. They also share some political views. But that ends the similarities. Banisadr had to run away from Khomeini. Clerical establishment in Iran resents Shariati. Soroush may have a different view of Western science, very much like many respected thinkers in the Western world, but he is not "ignorant of Western sciences and intellectual achievements."
6. Finally, although clarity and straightforwardness are two necessary features of "no-nonsense" intellectuals committed to social change, they are not sufficient for understanding complicated problems of underdevelopment and projecting a nuanced solution for their modification. Professor Dadkhah is certainly blessed with these two requirements. However, neither his impatient attitude toward complicated problems confronting Iran, nor his harsh tone against those who may disagree with his perspective, help us get any closer to the solution. In fact, one of the historical problems confronting the Iranian intellectualism, as Professor Dadkhah himself notes in a different language, is an absolutism that views the reality in an either-or format. Though well meaning, Dadkhah's conviction in the truth of his solutions to the ills of Iran is no weaker than the convictions of the intellectuals whom he criticizes. The absolutist and harsh tone of his critical comments leaves no room for the legitimacy and

tolerance of his detractors. One can disagree with those who believe that Islam is compatible with democracy or that the Iranian historical past has any relevance to its contemporary development towards modernity, but any effort at serious analysis and fair-minded and even-handed solutions to problems entangled with so many diverse interests needs to leave partisan accusation out of the debate. Such language descends the discussion into a polarized exchange where parties make wild claims and counter-claims without any effective solution to the problem.

Kamran Dadkhah

I am grateful to Professor Mahdi for reading the paper and making thoughtful comments. I would also like to thank Professor Zangeneh for providing this Internet forum.

Professor Mahdi is right about the necessity of providing a background for the title of the paper. Since his comments will be published together with the paper, there is no need for me to reiterate the background.

Dr. Mahdi writes that I have taken Ganji's *Manifesto* "to task." To take something or someone to task means "to reprimand or censure." I do not think that I did any such thing. Indeed, I have praised Ganji both in the paper and when I commented on the *Manifesto* on "Voice of America" after its publication. The problem with language also extends to another commentator who was bothered because I wrote "the nonsense of religious democracy." Nonsense means something that does not make sense. Religious democracy does not make sense. If anyone thinks otherwise, please enlighten us.

Contrary to Professor Mahdi's assertion, the economic issue is central to Ganji's "*Manifesto*." He extensively discusses the importance of a market economy and indeed considers it an integral part of the democratic system. I do not think anyone with a minimum knowledge of economics is unaware of the fact that the government and government-owned companies are choking the Iranian economy like a cancer. According to Dr. Ali Rashidi, an Iranian economist, next year's budget of the Iranian government is 125% of the GDP! Any move toward privatization, reduction of subsidies, and opening of the economy to international trade and investment would be desirable. The problem is that some are still hanging on to the bankrupt ideas of the so-called Marxist economics and government control of the economy.

It seems to me that the meaning of tolerance is not clear to all of us. If I have not expressed it carefully, perhaps now is the time to do so. Tolerance does not mean that people do not have strong opinions or do not passionately defend their views. Tolerance does not mean shading every statement with gray or complicating it with nuances. Each person may be a strong believer that his or her religion is the best. Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion. Tolerance does not even mean that you have to listen to other views. Tolerance means believing that other people can have different opinions, even wrong opinions. Tolerance means not sending ignorant thugs like Navab Safavi, Khalil Tahmasebi, or Said Asgar to assassinate those who have different views. Tolerance does not mean you have to buy or read *The Satanic Verses*. You may disparage it, burn your copy, or flush it down the toilet. But tolerance means that you do not order killing its author or announce bounty for his head. When I made reference to mini dictators I meant those who do not tolerate other opinions in this sense. To give an example, consider the fact that, when the so-called reformists and Mr. Khatami spoke of tolerance, they meant

tolerance of their views by the conservatives, and not the tolerance of, say, secularist ideas by everyone. In this regard, I had a telephone conversation with one of the “philosophers of reform.” After he extensively complained about the conservatives’ efforts to harass and silence him, I told him that that was exactly what religious people did to Kasravi. His answer was, “Oh no, that was different.” Indeed! It is unfortunate that an astute scholar such as Professor Mahdi twists words to confuse the reader, as if I had said that no one should be a strong believer in his religion.

Professor Mahdi says that I offer, “millions of Muslims around the world little hope for ever achieving democracy in their countries, unless they give up Islam!” I have difficulty understanding this. If Islam and democracy are incompatible and Muslims would like to have democracy, the implication is clear. Whether I offer hope or despair is irrelevant. But the fact of the matter is that for too long Muslims have tried to work both sides of the street. On the one hand, Islam is the religion of peace, according to Khatami and company; on the other hand, suicide bombers are praised. On the one hand, it is the religion of science; on the other hand, religious authorities and their underlings make the most vicious attacks on science, scientists, and rational thinking. On the one hand, the so-called Islamic intellectuals talk about Islam’s respect for adherents of other religions; on the other hand, preachers in mosques call for the killing of Jews and infidels. On the one hand, Muslims quote verses and chapters from the *Qur’an* regarding the rights of women; on the other, women live in total subjugation in most Islamic countries. It is time that all those who care about the future of Iran, the Middle East, and the Islamic world come clean as to where they stand.

Dr. Mahdi criticizes me for having said that Al-e Ahmad, Shariati, Khomeini, and Soroush wrote volumes, had nothing of substance to say, and were ignorant of Western sciences. But instead of showing what is wrong with that statement, he says that these people were different, and makes irrelevant points such as “Banisadr had to run away from Khomeini. Clerical establishment in Iran resents Shariati.” He seems not to dispute my characterization of these individuals, except to say that Soroush is not “ignorant of Western sciences and intellectual achievements.”

Any time I have opened one of Soroush’s books, I have been reminded of a scene in the noir movie “*The Big Heat*.” Glenn Ford, playing a detective, tells a bartender, “You talk a lot without saying anything.” As to his knowledge of Western sciences, you have only to read one of his articles, say, “Islam, Revelation, and Prophet’s Mission” (*Aftab Ordibehesht* 1381). You will find that, far from being familiar with modern sciences, he is talking about Gabriel and revelations and so on. His opposition to science and technology is well known and I will not mention his work as Khomeini’s henchman in closing and purging Iranian universities.

Perhaps I should remind the reader that Mr. Banisadr did not run away from Khomeini. Upon being elected president, Banisadr kissed Khomeini’s hand but had to escape the country when he lost favor with his master. Had he not run away, he would have shared the fate of his fellow traveler, Sadeq Ghotbzadeh. As to Banisadr’s knowledge of Western sciences, the following incident is instructive. Shortly after the Revolution, Banisadr appeared on television (there are people who still remember this show, and the tape should still exist in the Iranian television archives) and claimed that a kind of ray emanates from women’s hair that affect diastases in a man’s stomach and make him lose his concentration and balance. Apparently, the man has to be in close

proximity for the rays to have an effect. Moreover, the Islamic cover is a shield against these rays. We should be thankful to Dr. Mahdi for not nominating Banisadr for two Nobel prizes, one in physics and another in medicine.

By twisting and turning sentences, Dr. Mahdi thinks he has put me on the spot. If I am in favor of the liberation of Iraq, do I suggest the same for Iran? Here is my answer, and unlike him, I do not mince words. Liberation of Iraq was right and justified. I believe, regardless of short-term repercussions, that history will vindicate President Bush for a courageous act. I do not think, at this stage, that liberation of Iran is either desirable or possible. However, if all roads to a democratic and prosperous Iran are blocked by the clerics, and freedom can only be achieved through the American might, then that is the way to go.

But regardless of Professor Mahdi's shenanigans, what I alluded to was the importance of a democratic Iraq for the region. Already, we see that Qaddafi has recovered from his insanity; Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia have instituted reforms; and Syrian intellectuals and opposition groups have come alive. According to the latest reports (*Financial Times*, March 17, 2004), Iran has communicated to the United States the following road map for a rapprochement between the two countries: "Iran would address US concerns over nuclear weapons and terrorism, co-ordinate policy on Iraq, and consider a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In return, Iran expected a lifting of sanctions, recognition of its security interests, dropping of 'regime change' from the official US lexicon, and eventual re-establishment of relations." One can only imagine the effect on the region after the situation in Iraq is stabilized.

Throughout Professor Mahdi's commentary, I have been accused of generalization, over-reactions, not understanding nuances and complicated solutions, impatient attitude, harshness against those who do not agree with absolutist, an harsh tone, and me and on and on. I plead guilty to all. But let me ask the reader a question. After reading the paper, you will know where I stand on each and every issue that was brought up. After reading Professor Mahdi's comments, do you know where he stands on any issue?