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The Khamenei Roadmap
on the 40th Anniversary of the Islamic Revolution
Raz Zimmt

On February 13, 2019, Iran's Supreme Leader published a roadmap on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, in which he detailed the revolution's achievements, and offered advice to Iranian young people for realizing the next stage of the revolution. The roadmap reflects Khamenei's determination to maintain the values and basic principles of the revolution, both internally and with respect to foreign policy. It does not show any willingness on his part to adapt the revolutionary ideology to the changing reality and the demands of the public, and does not provide practical solutions to the hardships of Iran's citizens. Khamenei's uncompromising positions strengthen the assessment that it is not possible to promote significant change in Iran, at least not as long as he continues to hold the reins of power. At the same time, at this stage his refusal to move away from the revolutionary dogma does not pose an immediate threat to the regime's stability.

On February 13, 2019, Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Khamenei published an "important and strategic message" on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. In the message, Khamenei details the revolution's achievements and offers advice to the younger generation in Iran toward realizing "the second stage" of the revolution's path.

Khamenei begins by stating that the revolution's values are eternal and not limited to a single generation or a certain society. The Islamic Revolution, in his words, is flexible, sensitive to criticism, and willing to correct past mistakes, but at the same time adheres to and is committed to its values. The Supreme Leader called on young people in Iran to lead the next chapter in the revolution, defend it, and bring it closer to the most important ideal: the establishment of a new Islamic civilization that lays the groundwork for the reappearance of the Shiite hidden imam.

Khamenei details the revolution's main achievements: stability, security, and territorial cohesion; scientific, technological, infrastructure, industrial, and economic advancement; expanded popular participation in political affairs; citizens' deeper understanding of international issues, especially the "crimes of the West" and the United States, and the Palestinian problem; and a more just distribution of the state's resources and advancement of social justice, especially compared to the monarchic past. He notes that Iran still faces

threats from the West, but these are negligible compared to the revolution's early days. For example, if in the past the West sought to prevent Iran from having basic weapons, today it tries to prevent advanced Iranian weapons from reaching the "resistance" forces.

Khamenei's advice to the younger generation focuses on seven areas: science and research; spirituality and morality; the economy; justice and the struggle against corruption; independence and freedom; national honor and foreign policy; and way of life. Khamenei notes that despite the significant progress in science and research, Iran is still far from scaling the heights of world science, and young people must engage in scientific and technological progress as a "holy war" (jihad). He calls for thwarting the West's efforts to promote a Western way of life and corrupt the younger generation in Iran through social media.

In the economic realm, Khamenei emphasizes the need to strengthen Iran's economic independence, and specifies the main failures in managing the economy, including: too much dependence on oil, government interference in the economy, dependence on imports, and problematic and wasteful budget management. The solution to all of these problems lies in implementing a "resistance economy," which means reducing Iranian dependence on foreign elements. Khamenei rejects the claim that Iran's economic problems stem from the international sanctions and that it must submit to Western dictates in order to remove them.

In the realm of foreign policy, Khamenei notes that today the international arena faces an "Islamic awakening" based on the model of resistance to American and Zionist dominance, and that the United States and its allies have failed while Iran has expanded its political presence in the region. He emphasizes that no problem with the United States is solvable and that negotiation with it will not bear any fruit, except for material and moral damage. The leader of Iran also casts doubt on the ability to trust some of the European countries.

The Iranian leader's statement offers a roadmap for the Islamic Revolution upon entering its fifth decade. To a certain extent, it is even possible to see it as the political last will and testament of the 80-year-old Khamenei, who is nearing the end of his tenure. This roadmap indicates his determination to maintain the values of the revolution despite the significant challenges the Islamic Republic faces internally and externally.

Regarding the domestic arena, his words ignore the growing gap between the Iranian public, especially the younger generation, and the revolutionary institutions. Khamenei considers the main problem as disregard for the slogans of the revolution rather than a general distancing from its values, and places the main responsibility for Iran's problems

on the West, especially the United States, which, he charges, presents a distorted image of Iran and seeks to weaken it. He does not see a solution to the obstacles in adjusting the values of the revolution to the changing reality and to the demands of the young people, but rather in greater seclusion and an ongoing struggle against the West's attempts to impose its values. Khamenei understands the importance of the young people, but seeing them as adhering to revolutionary and religious values, in effect ignores the trend of secularization among many young people, who are moving away from religion and adopting a Western way of life.

Khamenei is aware of the economic difficulties and corruption, but maintains that the solution to the crisis lies in a "resistance economy" and not in deep structural reforms that require removing the sanctions, integrating with the global economy, and encouraging Western companies to return to Iran. In addition, while the economic issue is the highest priority for Iran's citizens, as is clearly seen in the ongoing protests over the past year, Khamenei places a relatively low priority on the economic issue compared to other revolutionary objectives. Thus Khamenei continues the path of the founder of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, who attributed limited importance to the economic issue and even declared that the Islamic Revolution did not take place in order to lower the price of melons.

In the political realm, Khamenei's roadmap ignores the increasing public demand for civic and political reforms, even if limited and gradual. President Rouhani shares these goals, and supports somewhat expanded personal liberties and reduced government involvement in the lives of citizens, for example, regarding the enforcement of the Islamic dress code and limitations on social media.

In the realm of foreign policy too, Khamenei's announcement expresses a commitment to the basic principles of the Islamic Republic, first and foremost, hostility toward the United States and Israel. Khamenei does not at this stage show any willingness to renew negotiations with the United States. Unlike President Rouhani, who declared in the past that he does not rule out renewed negotiations on the condition that the United States cancel the sanctions or at least suspend them, Khamenei continues to insist that the United States opposes the very existence of the Islamic Republic and seeks to change the regime, and therefore there is no point in dialogue with it.

In all, the roadmap does not hint at any willingness on the part of Iran's Supreme Leader to adapt the revolutionary ideology to the changing reality or to relax its basic principles. He does not provide practical solutions for the hardships faced by citizens and does not express willingness for concessions or compromises in view of demands for change at home and abroad. This does not mean that in the future Khamenei will be unwilling to

make tactical compromises in accordance with changing circumstances, as he has done in the past. However, he sees any significant compromise or withdrawal from the revolution's basic principles as a threat to the survival of the revolution and the stability of the regime. He continues to believe in the power of the Islamic Revolution to overcome the challenges facing it, and the power of his country's citizens to successfully cope with their hardships, as they have done since the beginning of the revolution, especially during the Iran-Iraq War.

Khamenei's uncompromising positions strengthen the assessment that it is not possible to promote significant change in Iran, at least not as long as he continues to hold the reins of power. This is despite the fact that the gap between the public and the regime's institutions is growing, many citizens are opposed to the two main political camps – the conservatives and the reformists, and the reformist camp is hard pressed to convince the public that gradual evolutionary changes are preferable to comprehensive, revolutionary regime change.

Nonetheless, at this stage Khamenei's refusal to move away from the Islamic-revolutionary dogma does not pose an immediate threat to the regime's stability. The protest movement still suffers from major weaknesses, and the regime continues to maintain effective means of suppression. There is nothing new in the Supreme Leader's roadmap. However, many Iranians still believe that the alternative to the current regime could be worse, and at this stage it seems that the fear of chaos is greater than the willingness to launch political upheavals whose consequences cannot be predicted.