

## THE FRESH OUTLOOK.

### Iran: The Silent Voice Within the Arab Spring

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Whilst mass revolt continues to grip the Middle East, there has long since been a notable absentee in the historic uprisings engulfing the region; a silent voice in the Arab Spring.

Despite notable skirmishes and a resurgent opposition, the people of Iran have remained elusive to capturing the revolutionary essence that has so beguiled their regional counterparts.

The lack of a sustained, widespread revolt against the Iranian administration in the current climate may seem to Western eyes as a reflection of the brutality of President Ahmadinejad's rule. Yet, according to Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, author, journalist and lecturer of Iranian foreign and domestic politics at University of London, who spoke exclusively to The Fresh Outlook, this absence of a revolt lies with the people, not the government.

"Iran is a different case because the country already had a revolution in 1979," cites Mr Moghaddam. "Even those Iranians who are in the opposition called for reform within the system rather than revolution. It is not a climate of fear that explains the survival of the Islamic Republic but the absence of revolutionary fervour. No state can cling to power merely through brute force."

Mirroring this lack of revolutionary fervour, Iranian politics is being shaped, Mr Moghaddam claims, by a gradual and less radicalised call for change.

"What we are experiencing in Iran is what I have called a 'pluralistic momentum' in my book, *Iran in World Politics*," he states. "The state is not a monolith. Rather the contrary it is being dissected from within and under the pressure of an embattled civil society. Hence, the political process in Iran cannot be monopolised by one single actor. Neither can the politics of the country be determined by the use of systematic violence... Yes, the state has an imperfect and arbitrary judicial system, yes at the height of the demonstrations it used systematic violence to subdue the demonstrators and yes the current administration of President Ahmadinejad cannot shirk the responsibility of what happened, but that is as far as it goes."

The aforementioned protests arose in the wake of the 2009 elections in which violent clashes saw three million people across the country protest at the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and, more importantly some would argue, spawned the Green Movement in support of opposition leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi. Though the movement's failure, both in the aftermath of the elections and beyond, can serve as an indicator for the current lack of widespread revolt.

"There is no penchant for revolution in Iran," Mr Moghaddam states. "The Green Movement was the reincarnation of previous reform movements. But its leaders, especially Mousavi made several tactical mistakes which I believe was due to a lack of political strategy. I would say that a) there is no clear cut backing of the green movement that runs through all strata of Iranian society and classes and b) that the Iranian state is sufficiently endowed with hard power - military, police, intelligence services etc - and soft power, such as ideological devices, to navigate through occasional outbursts of dissent."

"It is politically dead but socially active, that is to say the calls for reforms articulated by its leaders continue to reverberate within Iranian society, but as a political force they are discredited."

Yet the doubt that has befallen the political legitimacy of the Green Movement does not overshadow the need felt by Iranians for reforms of the system.

"I think the Iranian state will continue to be challenged by the Iranian population, young and old," Mr Moghaddam advocates. "The demands for due judicial process, more individual freedoms, and Islamic democracy are just and legitimate. These demands, rather than the movements - green or other - that claim them, have a strong backing in Iranian society. Many members of the Iranian state itself are aware that changes are needed, so hope is merited."

Arshin Adib-Moghaddam's latest book, *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations*, is available online and in book stores.

By John Thornton