

Theocracy of thugs

By Geoffrey Clarfield

The media both left and right have missed the fact that the **Mullahs** are also and continue to be oligarchs who are “gazillionaires” living lives of luxury behind those so called “austere outfits.”

An essay I wrote in 2009 has been republished in [Israpundit yesterday \(12th Jan\)](#)

***Peloni:** The more things change, they eerily remain the same in various and important ways, as demonstrated in this article below. **Geoffrey Clarfield** wrote this article some 17yrs ago, yet it describes both a similar situation today as well as what might be hoped to be the result of today's ongoing protests even as it failed to be the result of the protests which took place 17yrs ago.*

During the last few weeks, much ink, as well as some blood, has been spilled over the Iranian election. The competition between the two contenders has inadvertently triggered a youth-led expression of frustration directed at the middle-aged and elderly men at the helm of the Islamic regime – men ruling with an iron fist over a generation of Iranians who were born after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and who desire greater personal freedom.

As Canadians, we must remind ourselves just how different the government of Iran is from our own liberal democracy: Iran is a theocracy. The constitution of Iran declares that the official state religion is Jafari Shiism under shariah law. Ninety-nine per cent of the country is Muslim. A small coterie of priests, religious holy men, are in charge. No more than 1% of the more than 65 million people of Iran belong to religious minorities, like the Baha'i and Jews.

The most powerful political position in the land is held by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, who is a religious leader selected by an Assembly of Experts (other religious leaders). The president of Iran combines both the powers of a prime minister and a president. He appears to be elected by universal adult suffrage, but this is not really the case.

The Supreme Leader appoints a 12-member Council of Guardians, religious leaders who screen all candidates for the presidency. During one presidential election, the council approved only four of the 238 men (women aren't allowed to enter the race) who applied to run. Iran is therefore really ruled by no more than 12 men, who, with the Supreme Leader, have ultimate political power. The late Ayatollah Khomeini instituted this government by the few in 1979.

The regime spends a fair amount of time, energy and resources on its minorities – but not in the Canadian multi-culti way. Iranian authorities do not recognize the Baha'i – a religious sect that honours the religious heritage of Judaism, Christianity and Islam – as being “people of the book.” Its members are considered heretics, the law forbids them from practicing or teaching their faith and they are not protected under the constitution.

The Baha'i in Iran live in constant fear. Since 1978, the Iranian government has executed more than 200 of them. Baha'i cemeteries have been desecrated by the regime; Baha'i students have been denied access to higher education. Many Baha'i religious leaders have been under house arrest for years. The government keeps a small number of Baha'i in arbitrary detention, some of whom are at risk of execution at any time.

Jews have lived in Iran for over 2,700 years, but the Iranian Jewish community now numbers less than 30,000 people. They are not accorded equal rights under the law of the land. And like the Baha'i, they also live in fear. Since the revolution

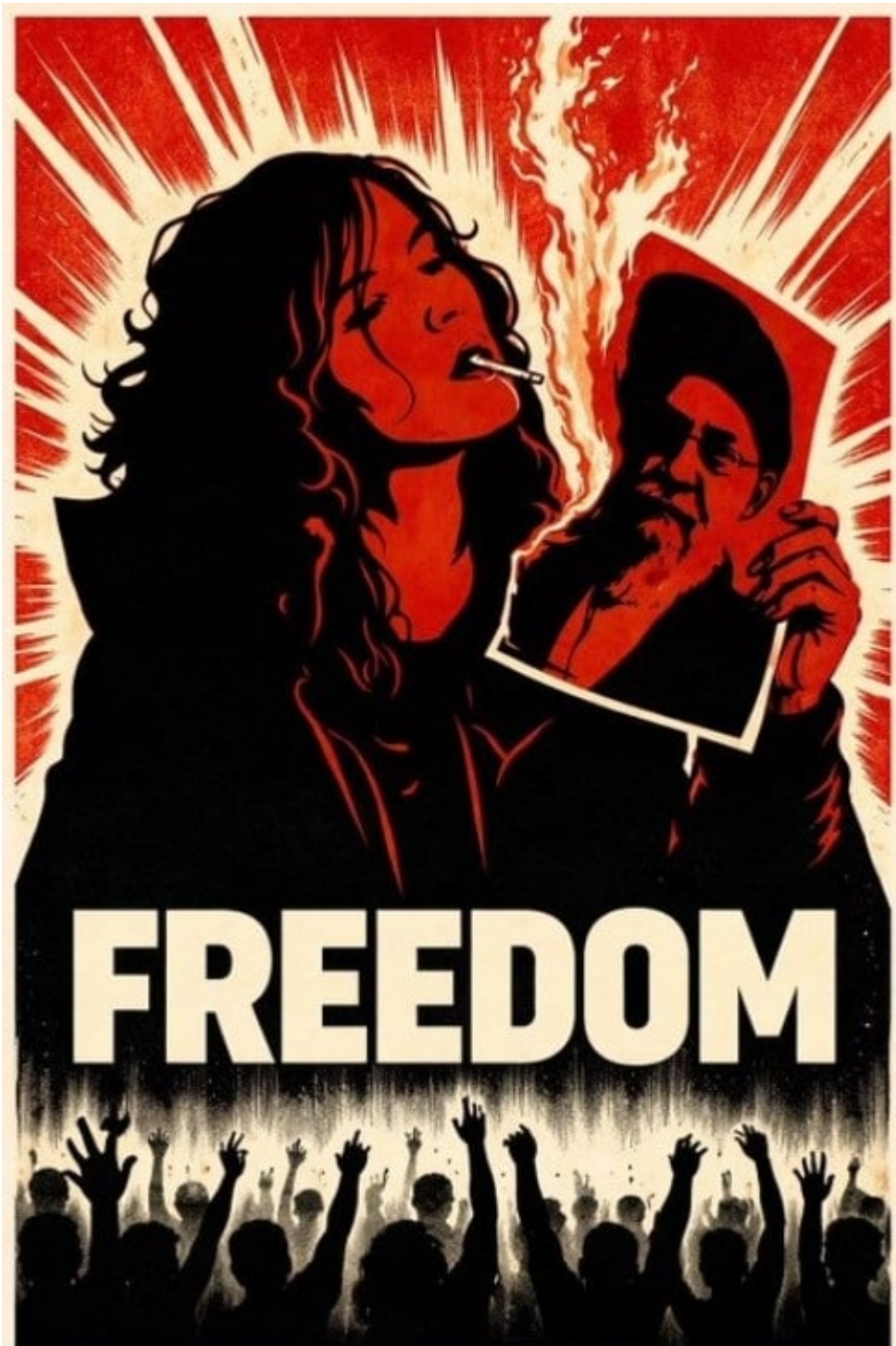
of 1979, at least 17 Jews have been executed by the regime. The most famous case was that of Habib Alqanayan, who was once the head of the Jewish community of Iran.

It is hard to be a journalist in Iran. Since 2000, 100 pro-democracy papers have been closed for criticizing the clerics. Dozens of journalists have been jailed. Several journalists who lived to tell the tale have said that they made false confessions under duress.

But it is not just religious minorities and critics of the Iranian regime who are oppressed.

Mainstream Shia religious leaders who do not agree with the Council of Guardians are harassed and arbitrarily put under house arrest. In 1997, Iran's dissident Ayatollah Montazeri was stripped of his title and put under house arrest by the government. His "crime" was that he had questioned and criticized the unaccountable rule exercised by Khamenei and his associates. He has argued that Khamenei and the Guardians should be held accountable and open to public criticism for their actions. He has also argued that the Islamic republican constitution (which he once helped draft) should be amended. He is more than 80 years old.

Iran has one of the highest execution rates in the world. Every year, 300-400 people are executed by the regime – they are usually hanged, often in public. Most of them are young and unemployed. Victims include women convicted of adultery and many minors.



No doubt sociologists will point out the obvious correlation for Iran: high unemployment rate equals high execution rate.

Since 1999, Iran's oil revenues have tripled. The country holds 9% of known oil reserves and 15% of global national gas deposits. And yet, current GDP is estimated at US\$1,800 – which is 9% lower than before the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Inflation is 25%; unemployment is estimated at 20%-40%.

Where has all of Iran's oil wealth gone? It has gone to so many of those "men in black," whose modest religious dress distracts us from their personal fortunes, which often number in the hundreds of millions.

The most famous of these "mullah millionaires" is Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, an ayatollah, former president of the Islamic Republic and chairman of the expediency council, which resolves disputes between the clerics and parliament. In 1979, Rafsanjani and the radical mullahs who took over the country from the Shah seized almost everything of value – banks, hotels, car and chemical companies, drug companies and consumer goods. They put these companies under Islamic charitable foundations, which they personally controlled and used for their personal and familial enrichment.

It is not widely known that many of the most radical enemies of the West among Iran's ruling clerics have become multi-millionaires. Economists estimate that about 50 families with links to Iran's leading clerics control most of the country's wealth. Iranian economists estimate capital flight out of Iran of up to \$3-billion annually.

*The mullahs would have us believe that they have a monopoly on the Islamic culture of Iran. But in his national epic, *The Book of Kings*, the ninth-century Persian Muslim poet Firdausi described the peoples' choice, a king, as "a wise man and just ... justice did he spread and the land was better for his reign." If the mullahs keep on robbing their country, not only will the youth of Iran rise up, but their parents will also call for their replacement by a fair and democratic government. On that day, we may see a real election for the Iranian presidency.*

