More than two decades after its victory, Iran’s Islamic revolution has resulted in profound theoretical and theological consequences for Shiite political thought. This unfolding discourse—especially as represented by the writings of highly celebrated figures such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Hojjatoleslam Hasan Yosufi Eshkevari, Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Mojtabah Shabestari, and Hojjatoleslam Mohsen Kadivar—revolves around two principal themes: the question of religion and reform, and religion and social and political freedom. These questions, which go to the heart of Shiism’s role in the larger polity, are, significantly, being asked by notable members of the clerical establishment and by other renowned thinkers. Equally important is the fluid political context within which these Shiite thinkers are gaining increasing intellectual popularity among the urban middle classes, therefore magnifying the relevance of their writings to evolving political circumstances. Already the consequences of the debate have proven to be more than merely philosophical. The discourse has had a significant impact on the formulation of public policy in Iran, on the larger Iranian polity, and even on Iran’s relations with the outside world. Not surprisingly, the evolving nature of the discourse, and the direction in which the debate ultimately heads, will determine much in the future of Iranian politics.

THE DEBATE

In large measure, the current scholarly debate is an outgrowth of the 1978-79 revolution. More specifically, the gradual consolidation of the post-revolutionary regime, coupled with the ensuing political changes occurring in Iran over the last decade or so, have enabled many of the country’s theologians and academics to openly write about and debate the proper role of religion in politics and the very essence of Shiite thought. Some of these debates and discussions revolve around Shiite hermeneutics. Others deal with the ideal role that religion ought to play in the contemporary polity. And still others are more pointedly political. In recent years, these debates have reached such depth and levels of mass currency that they have moved beyond the halls of the academy and religious seminaries and into popular journals, newspapers, book shops and the street. At both a theoretical and a practical level, Iranian Shiism appears to be undergoing a fundamental process of reformulation. Future research will have to examine the parameters of the theoretical debate...
surrounding core Shiite precepts and their practical, political consequences for the Iranian polity. For now, we can detect several broad and consequential trends.

This is not the first time in Iranian history that Shiite thinkers have proposed reformist ideas considered controversial by the mainstream clerical establishment. Immediately prior to the revolution of 1978-79, a number of lay scholars and theologians sought to reformulate some of the core principles of Shiism in order to make them more applicable to Iran’s contemporary social and political conditions. What makes the current round of debates and writings far more consequential than those of previous occasions is the larger political context within which they are being produced. The revolution marked the first time in Iranian history since 1501 –– when the country’s first Shiite dynasty was established and mass conversions to this branch of Islam occurred –– that Shiite theologians actually started controlling all levers of political power. The widespread rethinking of Shiite doctrines underway now in Iran is part of a larger process of historical evolution that began with Shiism’s capture of political power in the late 1970s, consolidation in the 1980s, and, now, reformulation beginning in the late 1990s.

The historically salient relationship in Iran between religion and the political establishment is changing. In recent years, this change has been facilitated by the increasing consolidation of the regime since the mid-1980s, especially after the end of the eight-year war with Iraq in 1988 and the death of the regime’s founder, Ayatollah Khomeini, in 1989. Both of these events enabled the revolution to start addressing some of the existential questions that had been pushed to the back burner, chief among which were the proper political role of the Supreme Islamic Jurist (velayat faqih), a position Khomeini had created and occupied, and the larger role of the clerical establishment in the state. With the coming to the fore of religious reformists in elections for the presidency in 1997 and the parliament in 1999, and the comparatively more open atmosphere for debate and publication that has ensued, this debate has picked up pace and, in very subtle ways, some political support.

Undeniably, Shiite thought in today’s Iran is influenced by the evolving nature of contemporary Iranian politics. In large measure, the vibrancy of the current Shiite discourse is a result of the state’s steady loss of ideological cohesion in the so-called “second” and “third” republics (1989-97 and 1997 to date, respectively). This is signified by the fact that many of today’s non-establishment Shiite thinkers held influential government positions not too long ago. The ideological fissure within the country’s Shiite establishment became especially pronounced with the 1997 and 2001 elections to the presidency of Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Khatami, who is a respected thinker in his own right. Khatami’s presidency has led to a flowering of scholarly writings on the various facets of the relationship between Shiism and politics.

Khatami and other like-minded reformist thinkers (eslah-talaban), who today constitute the overwhelming majority of active Shiite scholars, are generally referred to in Iran as the Left Front (Jenah-e Chap). The Left’s political accomplishments and intellectual contributions to Shiite theory and discourse have not gone uncontested. In fact, the reaction by the Right (Rast) has been both swift and often
repressive. Much of this reaction has manifested itself in political forms as such jail sentences and newspaper closures. In fact, the Right has put up very little theoretical defense of its position at all. Ironically, some of the published court testimonies of Leftist theorists today have been added to the corpus of “non-establishment” Shiite thought. Nevertheless, the political repression targeted at the Left and the spectrum of theorists it contains has not been inconsequential. It has influenced both the tenor and the essence of the discourse, as well as the larger perception of the public toward the debate and its main protagonists.

Insofar as the discussion of the proper role of religion in society is concerned, much attention has been directed to the precise nature of religion’s role and possible functions in three arenas: civil society, secularism and (broadly defined) freedom. More than a mere Khatami campaign slogan or an academic fad, civil society has emerged as a serious topic of discussion by Iranian academics and scholars in recent years. At the same time, despite noticeable manifestations of popular disenchantment at the occasional abuse of Islam by groups or individuals within the political establishment, Islam continues to pervade the lives and conduct of almost all strata of Iranian society, rural and urban, wealthy and poor. The question then becomes, how to reconcile the two—a religion compelling in its strength throughout society, and a social phenomenon generally perceived to be essential to maximizing society’s full potential?

Similar questions are being asked in regard to the role of religion in broadening or clarifying the parameters of social and cultural freedom, especially in relation to such contentious issues as women and youth, ethical behavior, entertainment and the like. A related question goes to the heart of religion’s role in public and personal life: in which instances and to what degree should religion serve as guide or an accessory to the practice and exploration of life in its countless facets? Religion pervades all aspects of Iranian life, and discussions revolving around the role of religion in society include a broad range of topics such as the relationship between religion and science, tradition, modernity, rituals, religious institutions and theology.

What makes the very asking of these questions so important in the historical evolution of contemporary Iranian Shiism is that they are emanating from within the clerical establishment itself. In fact, these and similar questions, which go to the core of Shiism’s role in daily life, are being asked by clerics with at least the rank of hojjatoleslam—individuals like Eshkevari, Mohsen Kadivar, Khatami and Shabestari, to name a few. Even the non-clerical scholars writing on these issues tend to be highly devout individuals (e.g., Hajjarian, Mohajerani, Soroush, Jamileh Kadivar and many others). The current debate in Iran over competing interpretations of Shiism is most intense within very committed Shiite circles. As such, it is likely to have historic and lasting importance.

Even more intense is the debate over the precise nature of the proper relationship between Shiism and politics, a question that touches on the very raison d’être of Shiism. Shiism itself started off as a political movement. Iranian independence back in the early 1500s was accomplished under the banner of Shiism; and, most important for the current discourse, the 1978-79 revolution quickly assumed the
form of a Shiite movement. Now, more than two decades after the revolution’s success, the once-united and cohesive Shiite establishment has become fractured over its perceptions of what role religion ought to play in politics. The tenor of the debate is intense, the breadth of the political issues it tackles wide. Should religion play any role in politics at all? Does the clergy have any special rights or responsibilities to be involved in political affairs? Even the venerable Khomeini’s articulation of the concept of velayat faqih has come under questioning. Is there indeed a need for such a position? If so, what should be the position’s scope of power and its limitations? Should there be an “absolute” velayat faqih (velayat faqih motlaq) or one whose powers are more symbolic and ceremonial, or something in-between?

ARCHITECTS OF THE DEBATE

A number of prominent thinkers have emerged as the main spokespersons of the unfolding discourse. Four individuals in particular have distinguished themselves by the depth and breath of their arguments, the intellectual and doctrinal controversy they have given rise to, and their prolific writings. They include Abdolkarim Soroush, Hojatoleslam Hasan Yosufi Eshkevari, Hojatoleslam Mohammad Mojtabah Shabestari, and Hojjatoleslam Mohsen Kadivar. Once members of the Islamic Republican political establishment, these thinkers tried to reformulate the relationship between Shiism and politics and have landed in political trouble for their efforts. Soroush has been subject to frequent physical attacks and is forced to spend long periods of time outside of Iran. Kadivar and Eshkevari have both been sentenced to prison by the Special Court for the Clergy. Kadivar has served his term and is now free, while Eshkevari is still behind bars.

Before 1997, when Khatami’s election rewrote “the boundaries of critical discourse,” Soroush’s position as the preeminent voice of Shiite reform was unchallenged. In many ways, Soroush (b. 1945) has picked up where the late Ali Shariati (d. 1977) had left off. As such, he has emerged as one of the most celebrated, and at the same time controversial, theorists in the post-revolutionary era. Having received a largely secular education as a chemist in Tehran and later in London – where he also studied the history and philosophy of science – Soroush was one of the first intellectuals to call for a scientific, dynamic approach to Islam once the Islamic Republic had been established. He was also among the first religiously committed intellectuals to call for a questioning of the position of the velayat faqih, long the institutional and ideological anchor of the Right, although he stopped short of attacking it directly.\(^\text{10}\)

Equally important is his assertion that if Islam were to be interpreted according to the needs and logic of today, it would become naturally democratic, as, he maintains, many other Islamic philosophers have also argued.\(^\text{11}\)

Apart from his philosophical arguments in themselves, Soroush’s writings are important in a number of other respects as well. He was, as already mentioned, one of the first intellectuals from within the Islamic Republican system to open the debate on some of the topics that had been off limits until recently. Most notably, his philosophical justification for debating the institution of velayat faqih allowed others to critique it more directly and bluntly in later years. As we shall see presently, this
institution has emerged as one of the central preoccupations of many of Iran’s other contemporary writers and intellectuals. Also, Soroush’s own background and history, his personal and scholarly beliefs, and his popularity among the public at large in many ways mirror those of an emerging generation of post-revolutionary Islamic intellectuals – what Iranians call Nationalist-Religious (Melli-Mazhabi) thinkers. Mojtahed Shabestari, Eshkevari and Kadivar all belong to this emerging category.

Similar to Soroush, Mojtahed Shabestari (b. 1936) presents a critique of “the official reading (or discourse) of religion.” As compared to Kadivar and Eshkevari, Mojtahed Shabestari’s concerns tend to be less directly political and are largely philosophical. This is not to imply, however, that he is any less critical of the official orthodoxy of the Islamic Republic. The primary difference is in the extent to which the average lay person can grasp his complex arguments and relate them to politics.

Focusing on Islamic hermeneutics, Mojtahed Shabestari criticizes the tradition that ignores the theoretical contributions of past thinkers and instead emphasizes the primacy of continuously original thought. In essence, he argues, this leads to the re-invention of the wheel. He maintains that a proper understanding of Islam – for him, Shiism – reveals its deep compatibility with civil society, political freedom and democracy, and human rights. Iran’s (Islamic) political system started encountering difficulties when “literalist interpreters of religion” acquired positions of influence and power, thus minimizing the importance of hermeneutics and accumulated knowledge. Religion, both in itself and in its larger role in the polity, goes much deeper than simple command of the science of jurisprudence. It is, instead, deeply and fundamentally compatible with freedom, especially the freedom to think and criticize.

There should be no red lines for critics, and we cannot have limits on the questions that can be asked. . . . The believer is one who is confronted with questions, is challenged in his beliefs by those questions, and whose beliefs are deeper and stronger at their core due to these questions.

More pointedly political are the arguments of Hasan Yosufi Eshkevari. Eshkevari was born in 1949 and received a traditional religious education in Qom. Active in revolutionary politics, he served for a time in the post-revolutionary Majlis (parliament), but increasingly distanced himself from the official institutions of the Islamic Republic and instead delved into “cultural endeavors” through writing essays and publishing books. In 1996, he helped found the Dr. Ali Shariati Cultural Research Institute, which he currently heads.

Eshkevari’s primary concern is with the inherently dynamic and reformist
nature of Shiism, which, in his conception, stands in sharp contrast to the innately archaic and repressive “official” Shiism of the Islamic Republican establishment. In particular, he takes issue with the notion of religion’s universal right to dictate the form and functions of state, and, in specific relation to Iran, its right to govern in absolutist terms. Instead, he maintains, absolute government only belongs to God and not to any velayat faqih. God gave humans the collective right to decide their destiny, and democracy is the system that best guarantees this divine right. After the defeat of so many other political models, democracy is the only alternative form of government that Muslims can adopt. In such an Islamic democracy, the clergy may, if they so choose, occupy positions in the decision-making and legislative organs of the state.\(^{15}\)

Eshkevari links Islamic democracy with religious reform (nogarai), and it is here that he offers some of his sharpest criticisms of religious traditionalists. “No one source of emulation (marja) is the official interpreter of religion,” he says in pointed contrast to the general position of the Right, “and no interpretation of religion is the definitive or official interpretation.”\(^{16}\) “In reformist thought,” he further maintains, “there is no need for any intermediaries between God and the masses, and each person is in personal contact with God.”\(^{17}\)

As if to further underscore his belief that the current system of velayat faqih needs to be re-thought fundamentally, Eshkevari calls for a “critical rethinking of the Islamic system,” which could only come about after a more profound examination of the essence, teachings and message of Islam itself. The biggest obstacle to all this, he maintains, is “Islamic traditionalism.”\(^{18}\) It is hardly a secret that Eshkevari’s real targets are the Right, in general, and the current velayat faqih, Khamenei.

Kadivar’s political biography is not too different from Eshkevari’s. Born in 1959, he studied jurisprudence (feqh) in Shiraz and later in Qom, and in 1997 succeeded in attaining his degree in ijtihad. Two years later he also obtained a PhD from Tehran’s Teacher Training College, having in the meantime held teaching posts at various universities in Tehran and Qom. In the process, he has emerged as one of the most critical and influential thinkers in Iran, having published more than twelve books and countless articles on such politically sensitive issues as Shiite political thought, the institution of the velayat faqih, and the relationship between religion and freedom. Even the statements he made in his defense before the Special Court for the Clergy –– later compiled and published in a book aptly entitled The Price of Freedom –– have become part of the corpus of the ongoing debate.\(^{19}\)

The bulk of Kadivar’s writings have been devoted to examining the various aspects of religious government in general and religion’s role in the Islamic Republic.\(^{20}\) An examination of these writings reveals Kadivar’s concern with four key themes: a firm belief in religion as a viable, and in fact necessary, force in politics; the compatibility of religion and freedom; the political role and responsibilities of the clergy; and the nature and responsibilities of the velayat faqih. It is in relation to this last theme that Kadivar’s views come into sharp conflict with those of official orthodoxy. After a long and detailed analysis of Islamic political thought over the centuries,\(^{21}\) he delves into a critical analysis of the concept of faqih. Although he never
quite challenges Khomeini’s seminal views, he comes very close to doing so. After examining the concept as articulated in the Quran, in the sayings of the prophet, and in Islamic and Shiite traditions, Kadivar comes to the conclusion that the concept has never been a central tenet of Islamic thinking and practice. In fact, he argues, it has only been a marginal notion in the long history of Islamic philosophy. More specifically, he maintains, absolute, religiously based faqih (velayat shari faqih) has no scientific and rational justification. This does not, however, necessarily rule out some modified form of jurisconsultancy that is subject to supervision and checks. The practical significance of this point, no doubt, has not been lost on the Right. Nor, of course, has it gone undetected by politically aware middle-class Iranians at large.

The arguments of these and other like-minded intellectuals are important for two interrelated reasons. First, while none of these individuals has held formal positions within the state hierarchy for a decade or so, they are deeply committed to – and generally perceived by the public to be supportive of – the basic tenets of the Islamic Republican system as a whole. They are also often closely identified with political groupings or specific individuals with influential positions within the regime (e.g. members of parliament; President Khatami, etc.). Consequently, they critique the political system "from within." Given the current political climate in Iran, this internal critique represents the most viable and popularly attractive alternative to the state’s ideological orthodoxy.

Second, and related to the first point, is the fact, that apart from Soroush, the three other individuals have received a classical Islamic education and have acquired the necessary ijazeh (permission) to be called hojjatoleslam. Nevertheless, given that their interpretations on the proper role of religion (Shiism) in politics and society differ greatly from that of the state’s more orthodox figures (Velayat Faqih Khamenei and members of the judiciary), they have run afoul of the political establishment and have found themselves prosecuted by the Special Court for the Clergy (SCC). Two points are important here, one political and the other intrinsic to the nature of the debate. First, the SCC has become the official arm of the state, controlled by certain figures within it, through which an officially sanctioned version of Islam is seeking to maintain its dominance over a more reformist Islam. Politically, the state is seeking to hold on to an ideological hegemony which is gradually eroding from within. A second important issue revolves around the very nature of these intellectuals’ arguments. Invariably, these four find Shiism not only compatible with but, in fact, an essential ingredient of freedom and progress.

Whether part of an intellectual maturation of Iranian political Islam, or a product of ideological growing pains in post-revolutionary Iran, the current debate on the proper role of religion in public and personal life represents an important development in the theoretical evolution of Shiism. Even if the more conservative elements in Iran succeed in completely silencing the country’s Shiite reformist thinkers, the seeds of reformist thought have already been sown. The Special Court for the Clergy, the conservatives’ arm for repressing dissent clerics, can hand down heavy prison sentences and keep reformist thinkers in isolation and
behind bars. But so far it has been unable to repress dissident thought altogether. Despite the Special Court’s best efforts, profound questions over the very nature and functions of Shiism continue to be asked. Quite frequently, books and articles slip through the hands of censors, often intentionally.

At the start of Khatami’s presidency in 1997, most Iranians thought that a new era of freedom and reform was upon them. Those promises and expectations remain mostly unfulfilled, torpedoed by the entrenched forces of the Right. But the reform movement within Shiism goes beyond Khatami’s presidency, which is merely a byproduct of the deeper fissure within Iran’s Shiite establishment. What is currently transpiring is bound to have longer-term theoretical implications for Shiite theology.

THE SOCIETAL IMPACT

The scholarly debate among Shiite thinkers in Iran has already transcended the halls of academia and religious seminaries. Through the unprecedented publication of countless books and journal articles, these intellectuals have emerged as influential (and popular) public figures whose arguments and theories have greatly influenced public discourse. Similar to many other developing countries, Iran has had a long tradition of politically aware and active public intellectuals. Today the most influential figures in the ongoing theological debate tend to be among Iran’s most renowned public intellectuals. As such, their arguments and their positions on various issues tend to have tremendous influence on shaping popular views and opinions, especially among the urban middle classes. This importance is all the greater considering that some of the issues they tackle have traditionally been considered off limits. All, for example, explore the superiority of knowledge and independent reasoning (ijtihad) to belief (iman). Considering the historical direction that Shiite theology has taken, this point may not seem far outside of the norm. But its politically revolutionary message is not lost on the current generation of politically hypersensitive Iranians. More to the point, many of the clerics in the group have been especially blunt in their theological criticism of the current political establishment. Kadivar has gone so far as to talk openly about the “crisis of religious government.”

Iranian politics features a free and open parliamentary system alongside an intolerant and repressive judiciary. There are spurts of journalistic freedom and uncensored publications, followed by sudden episodes of newspaper closures and arrests of editors and essayists. The system is at once both democratic and repressive. Whatever its internal inconsistencies, the regime’s application of repression has been uneven enough to allow for the mass dissemination of the writings of various reformist (or oppositional) intellectuals. As a result, the political sentiments of the urban middle classes and the views of Shiite intellectuals have come to assume a symbiotic, mutually reinforcing relationship. The questions asked by the public are often addressed by the intellectuals and vice versa. Should the clergy maintain a hold on political power? Is the notion of velayat faqih consistent with Shiite theology and precepts? How does one interpret Shiism in a manner consistent with political pluralism and civil society?

The consequences of the intellectual discourse for public opinion in general and
voting preferences in particular cannot be denied. Those areas of the political system that are open to input from the electorate – the presidency and the parliament – have seen overwhelming levels of participation by a public whose preferences closely mirror those of reformist intellectuals. The landslide electoral victories of President Mohammad Khatami and of reformist MPs are a direct consequence of this phenomenon. The intellectual debate is no longer merely abstract and philosophical; it has significant and direct ramifications for Iranian politics and for the life of the average Iranian.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The policy consequences of the intellectual debate for political actors both inside and outside the country are numerous. Domestically, reformist thinkers appear to have won over a substantial majority of the urban middle classes, as demonstrated through recent electoral results. Additionally, the Iranian press has been vocal in taking sides in the ongoing debate, with newspapers and journals roughly divided into the so-called hardline (Jomhuri Eslami, Resalat, Keyhan) and reformist camps (Farda, Iran Emrouz, Hamshahri, Kiyan). The activities of the reformist press have elicited especially sharp responses from the judiciary in the form of closures and arrests, in the same manner that reformist clerics have been prosecuted by the Special Court for the Clergy. The Guardians Council, meanwhile, whose job it is to guarantee the conformity of parliamentary laws with Islam, remains another bastion of orthodoxy and frequently rejects bills passed by the Majlis. The current controversy over the abolition of stoning as a form of death penalty is a case in point.

Reformist clerics (along with most MPs) have endorsed the abolition on grounds that it harms the larger interests of the Islamic system; hardliners have voiced opposition to the idea of a ban which, they maintain, would contravene Islamic teachings.

Reformist Shiite intellectuals may have found mass support through the ballot box, but their opponents still have control over most of the other levers of power. Nevertheless, there are significant areas of public policy – from government-sponsored campaigns to lower the birth rate to the creation of more job opportunities for women – that are being profoundly influenced by the discourse of Shiite thinkers.

Apart from the more obvious domestic ramifications of the ongoing intellectual discourse, there are also important consequences for the nature and direction of Iranian foreign policy and, more specifically, for U.S.-Iranian relations. Iran’s political system is full of contradictions and inconsistencies. These contradictions unfold in an international environment in which foreign actors (regional neighbors, the European Union, the United States and Russia) often have their own conflicting interests. All political systems feature a powerful nexus between domestic and international politics. For a state with internal political turmoil like Iran’s, the connections are all the more influential.

Of all the diplomatic factors that influence domestic Iranian politics, the nature of U.S.-Iranian relations is perhaps the most important. The reasons for this can be found in a troubled recent history that has featured American support for the pre-revolutionary regime, a seemingly unending hostage crisis, U.S. support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, and the conflicting interests of the United States
and Iran in the Persian Gulf region and the Middle East at large. Over the last few years, the overall nature of American policy objectives toward Iran appears to have shifted from one of containment and very measured opening during the Clinton administration to what appears to be a more aggressive posture after 9/11. The harsh rhetoric of American policy makers directed at Iranian leaders in the last year or so – the country having been branded as part of an “axis of evil” by President Bush in his 2002 State of the Union speech – has generally altered the nature of public discourse in Iran. There has been an undeniable strengthening of the hands of the regime’s hardliners. In fact, when a researcher recently conducted a public-opinion poll that showed most Iranians favor the re-establishment of ties with the United States, he was arrested and put on trial. Whether intentionally or not, the United States has shifted the precarious balance of political power in Iran in favor of the regime’s hardliners.

This has not, however, led to a complete silencing of the ongoing intellectual debate over Shiite theology, nor has it necessarily changed its general parameters. At the heart of the debate is the extent to which the clergy and Islam in general ought to be involved in politics, and, more specifically, what rights and responsibilities, if any, clerics have in overseeing the political system. This has direct consequences for the functions of the various branches of the Iranian state and the power clusters to which they belong. In broad terms, there are currently three power centers within the Iranian state: the presidency and the Majlis; the Guardian Council and the velayat faqih; and the Expediency Council, which is theoretically charged with mediating conflicts between the Majlis and the Guardian Council. At present, there is a precarious, though often shifting, balance among these clusters of power. However, if the general arguments of the reformist theologians begin to have greater impact on the overall nature of the Iranian polity, the Guardian Council is likely to take a less confrontational approach toward the reformist Majlis; the judiciary will become far less of a protector of orthodoxy (the Special Court for the Clergy may be abolished altogether); the velayat faqih is likely to become a more ceremonial position; and the powers of the Majlis are likely to be enhanced.

This, of course, is based on conjecture. But if these developments were to happen, Iran’s political system would likely become more democratic in the domestic arena and, diplomatically, more willing to improve ties with the United States and the European Union (Iran-EU ties have already seen drastic improvements over the last few years). As the recent controversial poll demonstrated, the Iranian public is clearly supportive of improving U.S.-Iranian relations. A Majlis less constrained in its actions by the chronic threat of veto from the Guardian Council will most probably become more reflective of popular sentiments. If the current intellectual trend continues, there is far more likely to be the political will on Tehran’s part to start talking with Washington. At that point, whether a similar political will exists in Washington to reciprocate will depend on American domestic politics and foreign-policy agendas.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


