

An Iranian in Exile Takes On a British MP.
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Ever since the Iranian monarchy fell to a radical Islamic revolution, I have chafed over the nonsense that has passed for history. It has become accepted that Shah Mohammad Pahlavi was evil and that the west had sustained him for too long. I also flinch when Iranians insist that their travails were caused by either the British, the Americans, or the Israelis. This is a failure to take responsibility for the nation's own folly in allowing Islamists to take control.

One such exile living in the UK, Reza Pardisan, has sent an open letter to Jack Straw, a British member of parliament, who recently returned from a visit to Iran where he compared Tehran to Athens or Madrid. He was promoting the notion that Iran is just like Greece or Spain, a view that is not only a fantasy, but dangerously wrong-headed.

Pardisan challenges this comparison, asking about the following facts on the ground:

\225 Tehran's deadly air pollution, which has killed at least 80,000 people so far, a number provided by the Tehran government itself. Even Athens does not have such a deadly situation; they have passed laws to ameliorate it.

\225 Suicide rates, in Iran averaging 25 per week among 18-28 years old. Are the Greek or Spanish young killing themselves in such numbers? Does Jack Straw ask why?

\225 Exile. Since the Ayatollah Khomeini took over (1979), more than 7 million fled. The exiled include the best and brightest, a real loss to a third-world country.

\225 Drug addiction is burgeoning in Iran. Is it in Athens or Madrid? Opium and opiates are back with a vengeance. Under the Pahlavis, this was not so.

\225 Mass hangings from building cranes, 2,000 in 1988 alone, and a constant stream since then.

\225 How about comparing the lack of political and basic freedoms in Iran with Spain and Greece? How about rates of inflation, poverty, and homelessness among children living in the streets?

\225 Human rights comparisons: do the Greeks or Spanish imprison or execute rape victims or homosexuals? Iran does. They also murder journalists who offend the government.

Like many in the West, England and the United States have bought into the nonsense that they were solely responsible for the fall of the Mossadegh government in 1953, ignoring the fact that Mossadegh was incompetent and was dangerously flirting with a Soviet takeover. Iranians themselves took down Mossadegh and the returning shah did not execute him, but remanded him to his vast estates to live out his final years. What Islamist leader would have done the same? Iranian clerics are nothing if not vindictive.

Like most educated Iranians, Pardisan has a very long memory. He urges Jack Straw to apologize for England's real offenses when Iran was weak, from 1700-1926. There were many interventions in Iran's affairs during that time because the modern Europeans had the power to do so and empire was the mode of the times. Both the British and the Russians played at this. Russia has resurrected this practice now, as we can see in the Ukraine and coming soon, Central Asia.

It is futile to apologize for issues that took place at another time and during another sort of world. However, we could begin to correct errors with unforeseen consequences by revisiting historic policies.

Our main mistake is to believe that democracy is what every country craves and should have. Authoritarian governments, including the late Shah's, did more to further national development and thriving middle classes than any democracy at the time could have done. The late Shah, like the military dictatorships in Taiwan and South Korea, believed that he must fix the economy first----and then have democracy.

Those who opted for \223freedom first\224 got only anarchy---or, like the unfortunate Iran, a very nasty religious dictatorship.

In the Middle East, freedom means freedom for men to do what they please. It never includes women or children. Responsibility and duty have nothing to do with it. It is the fault of their cultures and they need to quit blaming us for their own follies.

675 words.

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