

Drive regime change in Iran now

written by David M. Weinberg | 24.04.2026

With large-scale US military action against Iran apparently winding down, it is time for stage two of the campaign against the radical Islamic Republic: Knocking the Ayatollahs and the Revolutionary Guards out of power. Time for regime change.

With the right backing from abroad, this ought to be possible. Millions of Iranians surely want it. And while neither US President Trump nor Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu defined regime change as a formal goal of their current military assault on Iran, both leaders have encouraged Iranian protestors to take their country back – away from the genocidal, bloodthirsty thugs who continue to oppress Iranians and who want to crush the West and destroy Israel.

After all, only regime change can truly neutralize Iran's nuclear threat for the long term, and only the Iranian people themselves can overturn the regime.

There is much that US and Israel and others can do to support the emergence of a muscular Iranian opposition movement. This includes running an aggressive propaganda campaign against the regime (through, for example, a dedicated anti-regime media outlet), training of opposition factions inside Iran and supplying them with weapons, more overt and covert strikes on key IRGC and Basij commanders, and further degradation of Iran's proxy armies in Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, and Yemen.

Most important of all is maintenance of the current oil and economic blockade on Iran, with no sanctions relief for the regime and no withdrawal of significant US military forces from the region.

The US, Israel and others should have been working on this over the past 40 years, but almost nobody did so. Alas, anybody who advocated for assiduous efforts at regime change in Iran was considered a quirky and pesky purveyor of unrealistic policies.

On such Don Quixote was the late, great Israeli intelligence official Uri Lubrani, who died in 2018 (and I eulogized him then as an unrequited prophet). His foremost desire was to see the Islamic revolutionary regime in Iran overthrown,

and he passionately believed that Israel and Western powers could and should do much more to bring this about.

Lubrani was a fixture in the Israeli foreign affairs and defense establishment for 60 years, and I was fortunate to know him. He smuggled Jewish immigrants into British-Mandate Palestine while serving in the Haganah and fought in the War of Independence. He was bureau chief to foreign minister Moshe Sharett, and Arab affairs advisor and bureau director to prime minister and defense minister David Ben-Gurion. He served under every administration all the way through to Netanyahu.

While serving as ambassador to Ethiopia, he orchestrated Operation "Operation Solomon," which brought 20,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel. In the 1980s he was coordinator of operations in Lebanon and made ultimately unsuccessful efforts to repatriate captured Israeli airman Ron Arad.

Most notably, he served as Israel's head of mission in Tehran from 1973-1978, the final years of the Jewish state's strong ties to Iran before the fall of the Shah. His claim to fame was that he foresaw the fall of the Shah six months before it happened; but nobody believed him, including CIA analysts.

Lubrani embarked on a one-man, 40-year-long campaign to foment regime change in Iran. He authored articles and policy papers arguing that this was possible and should be a priority program, and he presented his arguments to anyone in Washington and Jerusalem who would listen to him; but not too many officials would.

He believed that Iran would get a nuclear weapon one way or another, and he fervently felt that alongside Iran's radical Islamic revolutionary ambitions this would threaten the entire world. Therefore, he passionately argued, the only way to preclude the threat was by supporting change from within Iran.

In 2010 he said: "The real issue is not the (nuclear) weapon itself, but who has their finger on the trigger. Therefore, the current regime must be replaced by a rational one."

Lubrani was convinced that regime change in Iran was feasible and even inevitable. "I believe that Tehran can be taken over by a relatively small force, determined, ruthless, cruel," he told the BBC in 1982. He sought to stitch

together a network of Iranian dissidents who one day might act, and he sought Western psychological warfare and financial assistance for these opposition figures.

When the Green Revolution rocked the streets of Teheran and other major cities following the corrupt Iranian elections of 2009, Lubrani was joined by some experts who felt that an opportunity was at hand to reinforce the protestors and bring about an end to the regime of the Ayatollahs.

But Barack Obama, who was president of the US at that time, was deaf to the pleas of the Iranian protestors, and to free-Iran advocates like Lubrani. Instead, Obama already was secretly promising goodies to the Ayatollahs in exchange for a nuclear deal.

Lubrani was out of commission when a round of social-political protests rocked Iran in December 2012, but you could hear echoes of Lubrani in the ensuing public policy debates. Could this lead to regime change in Iran; should America and other important actors weigh-in with moral and material support for the protestors; or would such Western “interference” only delegitimize the protestors and backfire?

Sure enough, the usual suspects (mainly former Obama administration officials) argued that Washington should stand back and do no more than pray for the protestors. They noted that the Islamic Republic’s apparatuses were vast and sturdy, that the Iranian machine of oppression was well-oiled and brutal, and that Tehran’s regional and international alliances were impressive and empowering – so the likelihood of overthrowing the regime was slim; it was wishful thinking, at best. And anyway, there was Obama’s signature “achievement” – the JCPOA nuclear agreement – to protect and defend.

Other analysts, however, noted a qualitative difference in the 2012 protests, and saw opportunities to weaken the regime. As opposed to economic and corruption protests of the past, this new round had a nationalist edge to it, meaning that the demonstrators were calling for a return to Iran of before the Islamic revolution.

“Stop investing in Syria, start investing in us” (halt the imperial overstretch), “Clerics, go home, free the country,” and “Death to Khamenei, we want (Shah) Pahlavi” – were the protest slogans.

These are exactly the slogans that drove the mass protests in the streets of Iran this year, in 2026, too, with hundreds of thousand of Iranians seeking to bring down the regime - until Ayatollah Khamenei (who is now in purgatory) slaughtered tens of thousands of his own citizens, and Trump told the protestors to hold off until he completes decapitation of regime leaders.

Sure, the rhetoric of Western support for Iranian protestors this year has been far more pronounced than ever before. Even some European leaders have said that all freedom-loving peoples must stand with Iranian protestors, that Tehran is a dictatorship on borrowed time, that the immunity of the regime is a myth, and so on. But rhetoric is cheap.

Prime Minister Netanyahu: "We stand with those in Iran who stand for freedom. I believe that a day will come when this horrible tyranny will disappear... And at that point, the historic friendship between the people of Israel and the people of Persia will be reestablished."

Mossad chief David Barnea (speaking on Holocaust Remembrance Day last week): "Our commitment will only be complete once the extremist regime in Iran is replaced. This regime that seeks our destruction must pass from this world. This is our mission. We will not stand by, watching, in the face of another existential threat."

US President Trump: "To the great, proud people of Iran, I say tonight that the hour of your freedom is at hand... When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be probably your only chance for generations."

Fine words and fine sentiment. But what is concretely being done beyond attenuated airstrikes to advance a real Iranian counter-revolution? Not clear.

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