Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on Iran

by NANOWISDOMS ARCHIVE OF IMAMAT SPEECHES, INTERVIEWS AND WRITINGS

**John Stackhouse:** How should we in the West view Iran?

**Aga Khan:** That is an extremely complex question. It is an extremely complex question. I think one of the issues is: What is it that you want from Iran? I don’t have a lot of clarity on that, frankly. Are we talking about the nuclear issue? Are we talking about regime change? Are we talking about a decentralised or a free economy? What are we talking about when it comes to the situation of Iran? I personally don’t have a lot of clarity. First of all we’re talking about the nuclear issue. Then we’re talking about an electoral process that everyone thinks is infamous, if I can use that word. We’re talking about a relationship between faith and state which is unclear. So I find it very difficult to understand when I look at the Iranian situation. What is the priority issue that we’re really talking about? And I’m not sure that outside Iran, in the Western world, there is clarity on that either. I don’t know whether you have the same feeling.

**John Stackhouse:** I think the enigmatic quality of Iran is the thing that makes the situation so frightening — it raises the odds of a misunderstanding. And that’s always the issue. It’s not always clear what the other side wants. It’s not always clear who’s speaking on whose behalf.

**Aga Khan:** But do you have an understanding? All the issues you’ve just enumerated, what is it that are the priority issues that have to be solved?

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2010 Globe and Mail Interview (4th) with John Stackhouse (Toronto, Canada)

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**Jean-Jacques Lafaye:** How do you see Iran’s ambiguous attitude to [the nuclear] issue?
Aga Khan: Iran’s current policy in this respect is causing concern in the Sunni world. If Tehran managed to obtain nuclear weapons, certain states in the region could just as easily equip themselves with a bomb, probably with help from the West. The atmosphere is tense, even paranoid. Nevertheless, through the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is important to build up and maintain constructive collaboration with the Iranian authorities in dealing with this issue.

Iran could even contribute to the worldwide removal of nuclear energy for military use. That is what I told the Iranians several years ago:

"Your history is that of an intellectual nation several thousand years old which has brought to Islam all the richness of its culture and its philosophical thought. Keep following the path that is truly your own and the world will thank you for it."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2010 Politique Internationale Interview with Jean-Jacques Lafaye (Paris, France)

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John Stackhouse / Patrick Martin: This week the President in the United States, in the State of the Union Address, mentioned what he called an “Axis of Evil.” There’s North Korea, there’s Iran, and there’s Iraq: Two of those three are Muslim nations. How did you feel when you heard that?

Aga Khan: I find it difficult to pass a moral judgement on all Iran or all Iraq. I will not do that. I have to tell you very frankly. I will not stigmatise a whole population as being evil. Whether they are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, I will not do it. It is, in my view, a very serious issue. I can’t do that. If he wants to say that the people in government are responsible for things that he doesn’t like, that’s his prerogative. But don’t stigmatise a whole country.

John Stackhouse / Patrick Martin: Do you think he’s done that?

Aga Khan: Well that’s what I interpret your statement. That’s what you tell me.

John Stackhouse / Patrick Martin: Certainly those were his words...
Aga Khan: If that’s the way ...  

John Stackhouse / Patrick Martin: He was careful to focus on the leadership of Iran.  

Aga Khan: Yes, but you see what I mean, can you imagine how sensitive that is for every Iranian living in the world? To say the President of the most powerful country in the world today has stigmatised me as an evil country?

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2002 Globe and Mail Interview (3rd) with John Stackhouse and Patrick Martin (Toronto, Canada)  

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Michael Charlton: Would you agree it’s almost inevitable that one sees Islam in terms of revolutionary Islam at the moment because it is that which is claiming the world’s attention, particularly in strategic areas like the Middle East? But is that portrait of ferment and turmoil, do you see that extending? Is that how one should see the logical development, or is it in a sense unrepresentative?

Aga Khan: No, I don’t think it is, it is representative of the Muslim world today. I think it is certainly the area, the areas in the Islamic world which are newsworthy in that sense. But to me it’s not representative. It’s a little bit as if I were to turn around and say, all right, in the Western world, where was the Fourth Republic in France, or democracy in Italy today — is that representative of democracy in the Western world? It’s not, but at the same time it is a problem within a given area. I don’t think that the situation in Iran or in the Middle East today is symbolic of the totality of the Islamic world. I think that the situation that you have been referring to in the Middle East and in Iran is a maturing process. Any crisis is a maturing process, and in that sense I think that it is improbable that this ferment will extend throughout the Islamic world. I just don’t think you can generalise in those terms. Most of the Muslim leaders that I have met and talked to recently are well aware of the problem. Some issues which contribute to the problem, they control; others they don’t. It is a little bit like in the Western world.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1979 BBC Radio 4 Interview with Michael Charlton (London, United Kingdom)
**ITV:** Do you have any sympathy with the more fundamentalist elements of Shi’ism with the leaders for example of Iran, Pakistan or Libya?

**Aga Khan:** I understand what are the pressures upon them, whether I necessarily share the reactions to those pressures is not necessarily true.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1985 Independent Television (ITV) Interview (London, United Kingdom)

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