

9. L'hétérogénéité des valeurs et des régimes

Toutes les révolutions civiles et politiques ont eu une patrie et s'y sont renfermées. La Révolution française n'a pas eu de territoire propre ; bien plus, son effet a été d'effacer en quelque sorte de la carte toutes les anciennes frontières. On l'a vue rapprocher ou diviser les hommes en dépit des lois, des traditions, des caractères, de la langue, rendant parfois ennemis des compatriotes, et frères des étrangers ; ou plutôt elle a formé, au-dessus de toutes les nationalités particulières, une patrie intellectuelle commune dont les hommes de toutes les nations ont pu devenir citoyens.

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Problématique de la séance

Si certaines approches considèrent les États comme des acteurs formellement interchangeable, d'autres courants insistent sur la diversité des régimes politiques, des idéologies et des valeurs. Les idées qui structurent les États de l'intérieur sont-elles dissociables de celles qui structurent leurs relations ? Que se passe-t-il lorsque certains États agissent au nom d'une vision du monde incompatible, voire antagonique avec celle de leurs pairs ? Quel est le degré d'hétérogénéité des relations internationales contemporaines, entre les tendances à l'uniformisation de la globalisation et l'opposition de plus en plus marquée entre les démocraties et les « démocraties » ?

Extraits proposés à la lecture

1. Emmanuel KANT, *Essai philosophique sur la paix perpétuelle*, Paris, G. Fischbacher, 1880 (1795), pp. 13-15.
2. Raymond ARON, *Paix et guerre entre les nations*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 2004 (1962), pp. 108-112.
3. Samuel HUNTINGTON, « The Clash of Civilizations », *Foreign Affairs*, 1993.
4. Michael DOYLE, « Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs », *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 12, n° 3, 1983, pp. 213-217.
5. J.-B. JEANGENE VILMER, A. ESCORCIA, M. GUILLAUME, J. HERRERA, *Les Manipulations de l'information : un défi pour nos démocraties*, rapport du Centre d'analyse, de prévision et de stratégie (CAPS) et de l'Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire (IRSEM), 2018.
6. Discours prononcé par Xi Jinping au Forum économique mondial de Davos, 6 avril 2017.
7. Discours prononcé par Mike Pompeo, secrétaire d'État américain, au Hudson Institute (New York), 30 octobre 2019.
8. *New York Times*, « Trump, Like Obama, Seeks Change in Iran. But He Differs in How to Do It. », 14 janvier 2020.

Extrait n° 1. Emmanuel KANT, *Essai philosophique sur la paix perpétuelle*, Paris, G. Fischbacher, 1880 (1795), pp. 13-15.

(...)

La seule constitution qui dérive directement de l'idée du pacte social sur lequel doit se fonder la législation de tout peuple, est la constitution républicaine. Elle seule est établie sur des principes compatibles :

1° Avec la liberté qui doit appartenir à tous les membres d'une société en leur qualité d'hommes ;

2° Avec l'égale soumission de tous à une législation commune comme sujets ;

3° Enfin avec le droit d'égalité qui appartient à tous et à chacun comme membres de l'État.

Il n'y a donc que cette constitution qui, relativement au droit, puisse servir de base primordiale à toute constitution civile ; reste à savoir si elle est aussi la seule qui puisse amener la paix perpétuelle.

Or, quand j'examine la nature de cette constitution, je trouve qu'outre la pureté de son origine qui se confond avec l'idée même du droit, elle est la seule qui puisse nous faire espérer une pacification permanente. Voici pourquoi et comment :

Suivant cette constitution, il faut que chaque citoyen concoure, par son assentiment, à décider la question : « Si l'on fera la guerre, ou non ». Or, décréter la guerre, n'est-ce pas pour des citoyens décréter contre eux-mêmes toutes les calamités de la guerre. Savoir : la nécessité de combattre en personne ; l'obligation de fournir de leurs deniers propres aux frais de la guerre ; la charge de réparer péniblement les dévastations qu'elle cause, et, pour comble de maux, de supporter finalement tout le poids d'une dette nationale qui rendra la paix elle-même amère, et ne pourra jamais être acquittée, puisque par hypothèse il y aura toujours des guerres nouvelles. Certes les citoyens se garderont bien de précipiter une entreprise aussi hasardeuse. Au lieu que, dans une constitution où les sujets ne sont pas citoyens, c'est-à-dire, qui n'est pas républicaine, une déclaration de guerre est la chose du monde la plus facile à décider, puisqu'elle ne coûte pas au chef, propriétaire et non pas membre de l'État, le moindre sacrifice de ses plaisirs de table, de chasse, de campagne, de cour, etc. Il peut donc résoudre une guerre, comme une partie de plaisir, par les raisons les plus frivoles, et en abandonner avec indifférence la justification, qu'exige la bienséance, au corps diplomatique, dont le métier est d'être toujours prêt à fournir cette justification.

(...)

Extrait n° 2. Raymond ARON, *Paix et guerre entre les nations*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 2004 (1962), pp. 108-112.

La conduite des États n'est pas commandée par le seul rapport des forces : idées et sentiments influent sur les décisions des acteurs. Une conjoncture diplomatique n'est pas pleinement comprise tant que l'on se borne à décrire la structure, géographique et militaire, des alliances et des hostilités, à situer sur la carte les centres des forces, les coalitions durables ou occasionnelles, les neutres. Encore reste-t-il à saisir les déterminants de la conduite des principaux acteurs, autrement dit la nature des États et les objectifs que se donnent les détenteurs du pouvoir. Ainsi la distinction entre *systèmes homogènes* et *systèmes hétérogènes* me paraît-elle fondamentale. *J'appelle systèmes homogènes ceux dans lesquels les États appartiennent au même type, obéissent à la même conception de la politique. J'appelle hétérogènes, au contraire, les systèmes dans lesquels les États sont organisés selon des principes autres et se réclament de valeurs contradictoires.* Entre la fin des guerres de Religion et la Révolution française, le système européen était à la fois multipolaire et homogène. Le système européen-américain, depuis 1945, est à la fois bipolaire et hétérogène.

(...)

L'homogénéité du système favorise la limitation de la violence. Tant que les hommes au pouvoir, dans les États aux prises, demeurent conscients de leur solidarité, ils inclinent à se ménager. Les révolutionnaires passent pour les ennemis communs de tous les gouvernants, et non pour les alliés d'un des États ou d'une des alliances. Si les révolutionnaires l'emportaient dans un des États, le régime des autres États serait, lui aussi, ébranlé. La crainte de la révolution incite les chefs de guerre soit à se résigner à la défaite soit à limiter leurs prétentions.

Un système homogène apparaît stable aussi parce que prévisible. Si les États ont tous des régimes analogues, ceux-ci ne peuvent être que traditionnels, hérités du temps, non improvisés. En de tels régimes, les hommes d'État obéissent à des règles éprouvées ou à des coutumes : les rivaux ou les alliés savent en gros ce qu'ils peuvent attendre ou craindre.

(...)

L'hétérogénéité du système développe des conséquences contraires. L'ennemi apparaissant aussi adversaire, au sens que ce terme revêt dans les luttes intérieures, la défaite porte atteinte aux intérêts de la classe gouvernante et non pas seulement de la nation. Les hommes du pouvoir se battent pour eux-mêmes et non pas seulement pour l'État. Bien loin que les rois ou les chefs de la République soient enclins à voir dans les rebelles de l'autre camp une menace contre l'ordre commun des cités en guerre, ils jugent normal de provoquer la discorde chez l'ennemi. Les adversaires de la faction au

pouvoir deviennent, quoi qu'ils en aient, les alliés de l'ennemi national et, par suite, aux yeux de tels de leurs concitoyens, des traîtres. (...)

Cet entrecroisement des luttes civiles et des conflits interétatiques aggrave l'instabilité du système. L'appartenance des États à l'un ou l'autre camp est remise en question par l'issue des rivalités intérieures : du coup, les États dirigeants ne peuvent s'en désintéresser. Les luttes de partis deviennent *objectivement* des épisodes de conflits entre États. Quand les hostilités sont engagées, une paix de compromis est difficile, le renversement du gouvernement ou du régime de l'ennemi devient presque fatalement un des buts de guerre. Les phases de grandes guerres – guerres de Religion, guerres de la Révolution et de l'Empire, guerres du XX^e siècle – ont coïncidé avec la mise en question du principe de légitimité et de l'organisation des États.

(...)

En fait de cruautés ou d'horreur, on ne saurait établir un ordre du plus et du moins, selon qu'il s'agit de guerres entre unités parentes et hétérogènes, de guerres entre unités appartenant à des civilisations autres, de guerres menées par des conquérants contre des civilisations qu'ils étaient incapables de comprendre ou enfin de guerres entre civilisés et sauvages. Tous les conquérants, qu'ils fussent espagnols ou mongols, ont tué ou pillé. Les belligérants n'ont pas besoin d'être étrangers les uns aux autres pour être féroces : l'hétérogénéité politique, souvent créée ou, du moins, amplifiée par la guerre elle-même, suffit. Bien plus, la lutte entre unités de la même famille de civilisation est souvent plus furieuse que toute autre, parce qu'elle est aussi guerre civile et guerre religieuse. La guerre interétatique devient guerre civile dès lors que chaque camp est lié à l'une des factions à l'intérieur des États, elle devient guerre de religion si les individus sont attachés à une forme de l'État plus qu'à l'État lui-même, s'ils compromettent la paix civile en revendiquant le libre choix de leur dieu ou de leur Église.

Extrait n° 3. Samuel HUNTINGTON, « The Clash of Civilizations », *Foreign Affairs*, 1993.

(...)

World politics is entering a new phase, and intellectuals have not hesitated to proliferate visions of what it will be the end of history, the return of traditional rivalries between nation states, and the decline of the nation state from the conflicting pulls of tribalism and globalism, among others. Each of these visions catches aspects of the emerging reality. Yet they all miss a crucial, indeed a central, aspect of what global politics is likely to be in the coming years.

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

(...)

What do we mean when we talk of a civilization? A civilization is a cultural entity. Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, all have distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity. (...) A civilization is thus the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people. People have levels of identity: a resident of Rome may define himself with varying degrees of intensity as a Roman, an Italian, a Catholic, a Christian, a European, a Westerner. The civilization to which he belongs is the broadest level of identification with which he intensely identifies. People can and do redefine their identities and, as a result, the composition and boundaries of civilizations change.

(...)

The central axis of world politics in the future is likely to be, in Kishore Mahbubani's phrase, the conflict between "the West and the Rest" and the responses of non-Western civilizations to Western power and values. Those responses generally take one or a combination of three forms. At one extreme, non-Western states can, like Burma and North Korea, attempt to pursue a course of isolation, to insulate their societies from penetration or "corruption" by the West, and, in effect, to opt out of participation in the Western-dominated global community. The costs of this course, however, are high, and few states have pursued it exclusively. A second alternative, the equivalent of "bandwagoning" in international relations theory, is to attempt to join the West and

accept its values and institutions. The third alternative is to attempt to "balance" the West by developing economic and military power and cooperating with other non-Western societies against the West, while preserving indigenous values and institutions; in short, to modernize but not to Westernize.

(...)

The obstacles to non-Western countries joining the West vary considerably. They are least for Latin American and East European countries. They are greater for the Orthodox countries of the former Soviet Union. They are still greater for Muslim, Confucian, Hindu and Buddhist societies. Japan has established a unique position for itself as an associate member of the West: it is in the West in some respects but clearly not of the West in important dimensions. Those countries that for reason of culture and power do not wish to, or cannot, join the West compete with the West by developing their own economic, military and political power. They do this by promoting their internal development and by cooperating with other non-Western countries. The most prominent form of this cooperation is the Confucian-Islamic connection that has emerged to challenge Western interests, values and power.

(...)

Centrally important to the development of counter-West -military capabilities is the sustained expansion of China's military power and its means to create military power. (...) China is also a major exporter of arms and weapons technology. It has exported materials to Libya and Iraq that could be used to manufacture nuclear weapons and nerve gas. It has helped Algeria build a reactor suitable for nuclear weapons research and production. China has sold to Iran nuclear technology that American officials believe could only be used to create weapons and apparently has shipped components of 300-milerange missiles to Pakistan. North Korea has had a nuclear weapons program under way for some while and has sold advanced missiles and missile technology to Syria and Iran. (...)

A Confucian-Islamic military connection has thus come into being, designed to promote acquisition by its members of the weapons and weapons technologies needed to counter the military powers of the West. It may or may not last. At present, however, it is, as Dave McCurdy has said, "a renegades' mutual support pact, run by the proliferators and their backers." A new form of arms competition is thus occurring between Islamic-Confucian states and the West. In an old-fashioned arms race, each side developed its own arms to balance or to achieve superiority against the other side. In this new form of arms competition, one side is developing its arms and the other side is attempting not to balance but to limit and prevent that arms buildup while at the same time reducing its own military capabilities.

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Extrait n° 4. Michael DOYLE, « Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs », *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 12, n° 3, 1983, pp. 213-217.

(...)

In foreign affairs liberalism has shown, as it has in the domestic realm, serious weaknesses. But unlike liberalism's domestic realm, its foreign affairs have experienced startling but less than fully appreciated successes. Together they shape an unrecognized dilemma, for both these successes and weaknesses in large part spring from the same cause: the international implications of liberal principles and institutions.

The basic postulate of liberal international theory holds that states have the right to be free from foreign intervention. Since morally autonomous citizens hold rights to liberty, the states that democratically represent them have the right to exercise political independence. Mutual respect for these rights then becomes the touchstone of international liberal theory. When states respect each other's rights, individuals are free to establish private international ties without state interference. Profitable exchanges between merchants and educational exchanges among scholars then create a web of mutual advantages and commitments that bolsters sentiments of public respect.

These conventions of mutual respect have formed a cooperative foundation for relations among liberal democracies of a remarkably effective kind. *Even though liberal states have become involved in numerous wars with nonliberal states, constitutionally secure liberal states have yet to engage in war with one another.* No one should argue that such wars are impossible; but preliminary evidence does appear to indicate that there exists a significant predisposition against warfare between liberal states. Indeed, threats of war also have been regarded as illegitimate. A liberal zone of peace, a pacific union, has been maintained and has expanded despite numerous particular conflicts of economic and strategic interest.

(...)

Statistically, war between any two states (in any single year or other short period of time) is a low probability event. War between any two adjacent states, considered over a long period of time, may be somewhat more probable. The apparent absence of war among the more clearly liberal states, whether adjacent or not, for almost two hundred year, thus has some significance. Politically more significant, perhaps, is that when states are forced to decide, by the pressure of an impending world war, on which side of a world contest they will fight, liberal states wind up all on the same side, despite the real complexity of the historical, economic and political factors that affect their foreign policies. (...)

Extrait n° 5. J.-B. JEANGENE VILMER, A. ESCORCIA, M. GUILLAUME, J. HERRERA, *Les Manipulations de l'information : un défi pour nos démocraties*, rapport du Centre d'analyse, de prévision et de stratégie (CAPS) et de l'Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire (IRSEM), 2018.

(...)

Même là où n'existent pas de diaspora significative ou de minorités facilement exploitables, les tentatives de manipulation de l'information peuvent jouer, de façon plus insidieuse, sur les divisions sociales et politiques que connaissent nos démocraties.

La Pologne est à cet égard un cas intéressant. Le pays offre a priori peu de prises à des tentatives de manipulation d'origine russe : elle en connaît les méthodes (la guerre soviéto-polonaise de 1919-1921 est rétrospectivement qualifiée de « guerre hybride » – non déclarée, avec de la propagande, de la diversion, des tentatives d'influencer les minorités, etc.) ; 70 ans de communisme ont immunisé la population contre la propagande russe ; le pays n'a ni minorité russophone ni parti politique russophile et le sentiment anti-russe est très répandu. Pour autant, des tentatives d'influence indirecte sur les échéances électorales polonaises ont pu être observées (création de faux comptes sur les réseaux sociaux en vue des élections de 2018 et 2019). Moscou tire avantage des divisions politiques, accrues ces derniers temps.

(...)

Les tensions entre pays voisins sont également exploitées. Moscou travaille ainsi à semer la discorde entre la Pologne et ses voisins, en premier lieu l'Ukraine – cette relation offrant de nombreux points sensibles, d'abord historiques (les massacres des Polonais en Volhynie) – mais aussi la Biélorussie, la Lituanie et l'Allemagne. L'objectif est que la Pologne soit traitée comme un paria en Europe, s'aliénant non seulement ses voisins immédiats mais aussi l'Union européenne en tant qu'institution. En Lituanie, les autorités ont observé en 2017 une forte recrudescence de messages à l'attention de la communauté polonaise visant non seulement à exacerber les tensions intercommunautaires mais aussi à dégrader les relations diplomatiques entre les deux pays. À l'échelle européenne, Moscou tente d'isoler les États baltes (et la Pologne) en les faisant passer pour des hystériques russophobes paranoïaques auprès des États d'Europe de l'Ouest plus « modérés ». Entretenir les divisions parmi les pays européens sur la question russe, mais aussi les caricaturer, est un enjeu majeur pour le Kremlin.

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Extrait n° 6. Discours prononcé par Xi Jinping au Forum économique
mondial de Davos, 6 avril 2017

[http://www.china.org.cn/node_7247529/content_40569136.htm].

(...)

I'm delighted to come to beautiful Davos. Though just a small town in the Alps, Davos is an important window for taking the pulse of the global economy. People from around the world come here to exchange ideas and insights, which broaden their vision. This makes the WEF annual meeting a cost-effective brainstorming event, which I would call "Schwab economics".

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." These are the words used by the English writer Charles Dickens to describe the world after the Industrial Revolution. Today, we also live in a world of contradictions. On the one hand, with growing material wealth and advances in science and technology, human civilization has developed as never before. On the other hand, frequent regional conflicts, global challenges like terrorism and refugees, as well as poverty, unemployment and widening income gap have all added to the uncertainties of the world.

Many people feel bewildered and wonder: What has gone wrong with the world?

To answer this question, one must first track the source of the problem. Some blame economic globalization for the chaos in the world. Economic globalization was once viewed as the treasure cave found by Ali Baba in *The Arabian Nights*, but it has now become the Pandora's box in the eyes of many. The international community finds itself in a heated debate on economic globalization.

Today, I wish to address the global economy in the context of economic globalization.

The point I want to make is that many of the problems troubling the world are not caused by economic globalization. For instance, the refugee waves from the Middle East and North Africa in recent years have become a global concern. Several million people have been displaced, and some small children lost their lives while crossing the rough sea. This is indeed heartbreaking. It is war, conflict and regional turbulence that have created this problem, and its solution lies in making peace, promoting reconciliation and restoring stability. The international financial crisis is another example. It is not an inevitable outcome of economic globalization; rather, it is the consequence of excessive chase of profit by financial capital and grave failure of financial regulation. Just blaming economic globalization for the world's problems is inconsistent with reality, and it will not help solve the problems.

From the historical perspective, economic globalization resulted from growing social productivity, and is a natural outcome of scientific and technological progress, not something created by any individuals or any countries. Economic globalization has

powered global growth and facilitated movement of goods and capital, advances in science, technology and civilization, and interactions among peoples.

But we should also recognize that economic globalization is a double-edged sword. When the global economy is under downward pressure, it is hard to make the cake of global economy bigger. It may even shrink, which will strain the relations between growth and distribution, between capital and labor, and between efficiency and equity. Both developed and developing countries have felt the punch. Voices against globalization have laid bare pitfalls in the process of economic globalization that we need to take seriously.

(...)

There was a time when China also had doubts about economic globalization, and was not sure whether it should join the World Trade Organization. But we came to the conclusion that integration into the global economy is a historical trend. To grow its economy, China must have the courage to swim in the vast ocean of the global market. If one is always afraid of bracing the storm and exploring the new world, he will sooner or later get drowned in the ocean. Therefore, China took a brave step to embrace the global market. We have had our fair share of choking in the water and encountered whirlpools and choppy waves, but we have learned how to swim in this process. It has proved to be a right strategic choice.

Whether you like it or not, the global economy is the big ocean that you cannot escape from. Any attempt to cut off the flow of capital, technologies, products, industries and people between economies, and channel the waters in the ocean back into isolated lakes and creeks is simply not possible. Indeed, it runs counter to the historical trend.

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Extrait n° 7. Discours prononcé par Mike Pompeo, secrétaire d'État américain, au Hudson Institute (New York), 30 octobre 2019
[<https://www.state.gov/the-china-challenge/>].

(...)

That's why I thought I'd focus in the few minutes today before I take some questions, I thought I'd focus on something that is central to what the Trump administration is working on that is different from previous administrations. That's not political, we have just – we have taken on the challenge from the People's Republic of China in a way that the time is calling for.

Look, we have a long-cherished tradition of friendship with the Chinese people. We continue to do so today. We have a Chinese American community here in America that we love and treasure. I've known them through business and personal ties; I've known many of them.

But I must say that the communist government in China today is not the same as the people of China. They're reaching for and using methods that have created challenges for the United States and for the world.

And we collectively, all of us, need to confront these challenges from the PRC head-on, and along each of the many facets.

There are many opportunities, to be sure, but it is no longer realistic to ignore the fundamental differences between our two systems and the impact, the impact that those two systems have, the differences in those systems have on American national security.

(...)

We all too often shied away from talking directly about the human rights issues there and American values when they came into conflict, and we downplayed ideological differences, even after the Tiananmen Square massacre and other significant human rights abuses.

We encouraged China's membership in the World Trade Organization and other international organizations, premised on their commitment to adopt market reforms and abide by the rules of those organizations. And all too often, China never followed through.

We hesitated and did far less than we should have when China threatened its neighbors like Vietnam, and like the Philippines, and when they claimed the entire South China Sea.

Frankly, we did an awful lot that accommodated China's rise in the hope that communist China would become more free, more market-driven, and ultimately, hopefully more democratic.

And we did this for a long time.

There's another reason we adopted these policies: We didn't realize how China was evolving. Frankly, the American people didn't get the full story.

I've talked to so many business leaders. U.S. companies that invested heavily in China were forced to comply with China's terms. This includes just about any topic that the Chinese Communist Party deemed controversial.

Beijing's intransigence creates a permanent class of China lobbyists in the United States. Their primary job is to sell access to Chinese leaders and connect business partners.

And frankly, whenever there was a dispute or tension in the relationship, many of our scholars blamed the United States for misrepresenting the nature of the Chinese Communist Party.

Meanwhile, Beijing controlled and limited access to our diplomats, journalists, and academics to the main – when they were traveling to mainland China. They still do that today. If you saw the difference – if you saw the difference in how Chinese diplomats are treated and how American diplomats and the access they have, you too would find the absence of reciprocity deeply inconsistent with American values.

And China's state-run media and government spokespeople filled the gaps, routinely maligning American intentions and policy objectives. They still do that today. They distorted how Americans view the People's Republic and how they review General Secretary Xi.

These bad outcomes were all too predictable. They were predictable byproducts of dealing with a secretive regime that doesn't respect fairness, the rule of law, and reciprocity.

Today, we're finally realizing the degree to which the Chinese Communist Party is truly hostile to the United States and our values, and its worse deeds and words and how they impact us. And we're able to do that because of the leadership of President Trump.

Extrait n° 8. *New York Times*, « Trump, Like Obama, Seeks Change in Iran. But He Differs in How to Do It. », 14 janvier 2020.

WASHINGTON — Speaking at Stanford University on Monday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had an improbable request for Iran’s revolutionary Islamist government.

“We just want Iran to behave like a normal nation,” he said. “Just be like Norway,” he added wryly, drawing laughs from the crowd.

But as Mr. Pompeo and other Trump administration officials know full well, Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the generals who guard his power in Tehran will never shape their foreign policy to the United States’ liking. What Mr. Pompeo implied was less a change in Iran’s behavior than a change in its leadership.

President Trump and his senior officials insist they do not seek “regime change” in a military sense. But they clearly would not mind seeing their campaign of “maximum pressure” against Iran, now reinforced by the killing of its most valued military leader, result in a drastic upheaval — and possibly even fall — of Iran’s theocratic government.

“We support the Iranian people and their courageous struggle for freedom,” Mr. Trump said at a rally Tuesday night in Milwaukee, referring to recent antigovernment protests in the country.

His approach is a contrast to the one pursued for years by the United States during the Obama administration, which, along with Europe, tested the possibility that Iran could be coaxed, not pressured, into a new era.

While it was not a stated goal of the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran, many Obama administration officials believed it could lead to an opening of the country’s economy and provide a lift to moderate reformers who might gradually steer Iran onto a more benign path — and perhaps, one day, to an altogether different kind of government

(...)

When Mr. Trump withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal in May 2018, in other words, he didn’t just shred an international agreement. He also turned his back on a big idea about how a rogue nation might be drawn into peaceful coexistence with the West.

(...)

Administration officials are especially bullish about that strategy in recent days, as Iran’s government contends with renewed protests and absorbs the killing of Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani. And in an ominous turn for Tehran this week, Britain, France and Germany formally accused Iran of violating the 2015 nuclear deal, after months of effectively looking the other way at increased Iranian nuclear activity.

“In neither case was the ultimate, explicit goal ‘regime change,’” said Suzanne Maloney, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and former State Department official in the George W. Bush administration.

“But there was a kind of theory of the case under Obama that engagement could lead to the sort of fundamental changes in Iranian policy, almost irrespective of the character of the regime, that the U.S. had been seeking since 1979,” she said.

No one expected overnight change, but many Obama officials believed that Secretary of State John Kerry’s copious diplomacy with Mr. Zarif, fueled by economic integration, might be the beginning of a deeper relationship that could defuse Ayatollah Khamenei’s declarations that Iran could never trust America.

The administration’s current approach “contrasts in an almost perfectly polarized fashion” with Mr. Obama’s, Ms. Maloney said. That strategy, which began with Mr. Trump’s May 2018 abandonment of the nuclear deal and was followed by punishing sanctions on Iran’s financial system and oil exports, “rests on the idea that Iran only responds to really tough pressure.”

(...)

“We think the regime is in real trouble,” Robert C. O’Brien, the president’s national security adviser, told NBC News on Sunday. Mr. Trump’s special envoy for Iran, Brian H. Hook, recently boasted that Tehran’s clerical government faces “its worst political unrest in its 40-year history.”

Mr. Trump’s former national security adviser, John R. Bolton, chimed in on Sunday, tweeting: “The Khamenei regime has never been under more stress. Regime change is in the air.”

Mr. Trump and his top officials insist that is not their goal — especially not through the use of force. “We do not seek war, we do not seek nation-building, we do not seek regime change,” the president said in remarks this month.

It is clear, however, that administration officials hope to undermine the Iranian government. Early in Mr. Trump’s presidency, a memo that circulated in his White House written by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hawkish Washington think tank, suggested “a strategy of coerced democratization” for Iran.

“The reality is that Iran’s regional behavior is not going to meaningfully change until at a minimum there is a different supreme leader, and perhaps not even until there is a different government altogether in Tehran,” said Karim Sadjadpour, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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