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Political Depression and Psychological Strategy in the Age of Mass Resilience and Resistance: Excerpt from the Conversation with Dr. Hasan Abbasi and Dr. Mehdi Tabandeh

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Abstract. This discussion explores strategic psychology as a framework for understanding how societies oscillate between political agitation and political depression, and how these psychological states can be engineered to induce collapse or, conversely, to foster resilience. Drawing on historical cases, from ancient Greece's permanent decline after the Macedonian conquest to Germany's rapid resurgence after World War I, the conversation highlights how psychological defeat can be more devastating than physical destruction. The modern era, with its accelerated media cycles, amplifies these dynamics, as seen in recent U.S.-Iran confrontations. The discussion then turns to contemporary Iranian history, examining how the Iranian people have withstood successive shocks, including foreign-backed unrest, the martyrdom of their leader, and war, through a combination of theocentric resilience, psychological mobilization, and historical memory. Concepts such as the "jihad of the spirit," the "seesaw" of agitation and depression, and the "dose of fascism" are introduced as analytical tools. Ultimately, the discussion argues that psychological reconstruction and intergenerational transmission of resilience are essential for civilizational survival in the New Century.

Keywords: Political Depression, Resilience, Psychological Mobilization, Psychological Reconstruction.

This is an abridged version of the discussion.

Host:

From political depression to political agitation, and from there to the potential destruction of a society through psychological collapse, this discussion examines the place of strategic psychology in the New Century. We explore the imperative of psychological reconstruction and the jihad of the spirit, the inner spiritual struggle (Note 1).

In strategic psychology (Note 2), scholars examine macro-level societal issues, identifying problems and proposing viable solutions. The field operates on a broad scale, and while its dimensions may not always be immediately apparent to general audiences, they are deeply practical and carry civilizational significance.

To illustrate, the remedies for individual irritability or anger differ markedly from those addressing collective dynamics, for example when a significant segment of a population, a social group, or a political party experiences setbacks or societal grievances. Such groups may become politically disheartened or even agitated as a result.

In this discussion, we approach the subject through the lens of strategic psychology, with a forward-looking orientation toward the New Century. We ask: What is the current state of strategic psychology, and what vision should we articulate for its future?

Dr. Hasan Abbasi:

Human traits and temperaments are studied both in ethics and in Western psychology and psychiatry. As you rightly pointed out, these characteristics can extend from the individual to the entire society.

Consider the individual: when a person succeeds in their personal life, they become joyful, energetic, hopeful, and self-confident. When failure strikes, they may experience despair, depression, hopelessness, and isolation. The same dynamic applies to peoples and nations. When a society achieves victory or success at the national level, its collective mood is elevated. Conversely, when it suffers failure, it may descend into despair, depression, anxiety, pressure, hopelessness, and isolation, and in extreme cases, the nation itself may perish.

In strategic thought, a key axis that major military commanders rely on to confront an enemy is the ability to inflict sudden, tangible, and psychological defeats. The aim is to collapse the enemy nation psychologically, for once it falls psychologically, it may never rise again.

The most frequently cited example in this context is the defeat of Greece by Macedonia. Philip of Macedon, Alexander's father, swept down from the north into Greece, defeated Athens and Sparta, and brought them under his control. Aristotle, Greece's last great philosopher, became Alexander's tutor, shaping the mind of the future conqueror before his invasion of Persia.

What is Greece renowned for? Greek philosophy, theater, the Olympics, democracy. Yet this same Greece, the cradle of so many cultural, social, and political values that would later define the West, suffered a psychological defeat at the hands of its neighbor Macedonia some 2,450 years ago. From that point onward, Greece fell into a kind of civilizational slumber, never again assuming a leading creative role in human civilization. True, its values were later revived by Western European civilizations (i.e. England, France, and particularly America) over the last two centuries, which resurrected the Olympics and re-engaged with Greek philosophy in universities and art schools. But modern Greece itself never regained that civilizational vitality.

Why? Because the Macedonian defeat plunged the Greeks into a chronic civilizational depression. Their civilization gradually declined, becoming more a historical and tourist attraction than an active creative force in the world.

This is a crucial point: commanders understand that a blow which strips a country of its national and homeland credibility can psychologically drive its people to a point from which they never recover. It is possible to destroy a people with an atomic weapon, but it is also possible to leave them alive yet so depressed and hopeless that they take neither defensive nor civilizational action and never rise again.

A resilient homeland and resilient people are those who, through engagement with both defeats and successes across their history, find the strength to revive themselves. The most prominent case studied today in strategic psychology is Germany. After World War I, Germany was devastated in 1919, yet within twenty years it had re-emerged. By 1939, Hitler's war machine had risen again and set Europe ablaze. How did a destroyed Germany rebuild itself into a regional power in just two decades, and within five more years compel major powers from Soviet Union to England and the U.S. to unite in containing it? Much of the answer lies in psychology: Hitler's speeches, the resentment Germans harbored against their former enemies like France, Hitler's commanding body language, and the militarized salute, all reawakened the German people. Even philosophers like Martin Heidegger, one of the most influential German thinkers of the twentieth century, were stirred by Hitler's posture and rhetoric. Within less than twenty years, Germany rose again and set the world aflame; five years later, it was destroyed once more, and the world architected a new international order.

Now compare this to Greece. Greece possessed extraordinary cultural and military capability, yet after the Macedonian invasion, it never regained its civilizational vigor. Macedonia itself was not a lasting power; the Macedonians rose and fell. But Greece- despite its immense legacy, remained in a state of chronic civilizational depression. It was not physically annihilated, but psychologically it never fully recovered.

In strategic studies, one key area of inquiry is how to induce psychological collapse in an adversary. When a population is driven to

despair and hopelessness, it ceases to act and becomes paralyzed. In the modern era, media amplifies this dynamic considerably. During the recent confrontation with Iran, for example, one of Trump's primary tools was his near-daily use of X social media (formally known as Twitter), sometimes up to five tweets a day, mixing truth with falsehood in a calculated effort to erode Iran's psychological resilience and instill a pervasive sense of despair among its people. This tactic holds significant weight in contemporary strategic thinking.

Consider what the mobilization of the Iranian people signified during those ten nights when they filled the streets, waving flags in every village and town. From the very first days of the war, in their quest for vengeance for the martyred leader, Iranians confronted and overcame political depression. This phenomenon will require years of study to fully assess its psychological dimensions: to understand how the Iranian people withstood the devastating shock inflicted by a formidable enemy alliance (U.S.-Israel). That alliance, operating from bases in the Gulf states and backed by billions of dollars in resources, sought to finish Iran, provoke division, and spark civil war following the assassination of the Supreme Leader and key commanders, with the expectation of partitioning the country. The enemy's plan envisioned that within three to thirty days of the assassinations, Iran would be occupied, its territories handed over to separatist forces, and its Iranian-Islamic civilization erased from the map. Yet the Iranian people's mobilization thwarted that plan entirely.

In strategic psychology, the counterpart to political depression is political agitation. These two states function like a seesaw: a society's daily psychological condition can swing between depression, which demotivates, and agitation, which energizes and mobilizes. For any society, there exists a strategic equilibrium between these poles. When agitation runs too high, people become volatile; when depression dominates, they become passive and withdrawn. If the seesaw tilts too far in either direction, the society edges toward collapse.

Strategically, psychological collapse can be engineered. When political agitation surges while depression plummets, or vice versa, the societal fabric begins to unravel. Few societies reach the absolute extreme, but those that do may suffer a fate reminiscent of ancient Greece: a permanent loss of civilizational standing from which they never recover.

Consider Venezuela: the country lost its president politically; Americans entered Caracas at night and kidnapped Maduro. They seized oil infrastructure, and maps were even published depicting Venezuela as part of the United States. In response, intellectual elites and young modernists fell into despair. Some became utterly indifferent, abandoning their country's fate altogether. Others grew furious and aggressive, turning to radical movements or guerrilla warfare. Thus, under military occupation, populations bifurcate: they become either depressed or agitated. The indifferent withdraw; the agitated resist.

When political depression and agitation both reach their extremes, when the seesaw flips to a vertical angle, fascism (note 3) tends to rise. A fascistic spirit emerges when large segments of society are politically agitated. Just as individuals have temperamental differences (e.g. introvert, extrovert, perfectionist, aggressive, hysterical), nations too exhibit distinct dispositions. Societies with a strong emphasis on external discipline tend to show a higher "dose of fascism" in strategic psychological terms. Germany, with its historically high discipline, showed greater susceptibility to fascism; Russia too exhibited a high dose, as did several East Asian societies (i.e. North Korea, Japan, and China).

By contrast, Anglo-Saxon societies and Iranians generally register lower fascism-doses. It is difficult to impose rigid external discipline on Iranians; they require an internalized order aligned with their innate nature (fetrat). Islam, in this view, resonates with that inherent order. Consequently, Iranians resist externally imposed rules and are less inclined to accept the strict parade-ground discipline characteristic of Germany, China, or Japan.

In the New Century, the oscillation between political agitation and depression is accelerating, and we are likely to witness more frequent psychological collapses across the globe. Afghanistan offers a stark illustration: two decades of American occupation raised hopes, only to end in a chaotic withdrawal, culminating in the haunting image of Afghans clinging to aircraft wheels as they fled Kabul. The psychological toll was immense; parts of the population became politically agitated, while a significant portion sank into political depression. Many Afghans, stripped of hope, dispersed to Pakistan, Iran, Europe, and beyond.

Iraq and Syria tell a similar story of devastation. In Syria, the actions of the United States, Israel, and Gulf states that funded and armed ISIS, with operations partially managed by Turkish intelligence, resulted in over 300,000 deaths and more than 5 million people displaced. The country was plunged into a volatile mix of political agitation and depression, leaving little standing in its wake.

These dynamics are not new. In the previous century, Western intelligence agencies (MI5, MI6, the CIA, and Mossad) employed similar strategies of destabilization. Their objective has consistently been to negate a society's psychological resilience and undermine its capacity for survival.

Regarding the events of 18–19 Dey 1404 (January 8–9, 2026), which resulted in the deaths of several thousand martyrs (including civilian and security forces), it was later alleged that Israel's Mossad, in coordination with U.S. intelligence, had orchestrated the unrest. The objective was to drive Iranians toward psychological collapse by provoking extreme agitation: burning mosques, publicly killing security forces, desecrating the Quran, and inciting internal conflict, designed to flip the psychological seesaw and disintegrate the nation.

However, the seven-thousand-year psychological resilience of the Iranian people proved unshakeable. The conspiracy of 18–19 Dey 1404

(January 8–9, 2026) failed. Despite the involvement of 54 foreign intelligence agencies, including those from GCC states and Turkey's MIT, the Iranian response was swift and decisive. Less than a month later, the people took to the streets in defense of the Islamic Republic. And just 50 to 60 days later, when war broke out, initiated by the U.S. and Israel, and the Supreme Leader was martyred, with schools like Minab coming under attack (resulting in killing of 168 schoolchildren), the people mobilized once again. Psychological reconstruction began in earnest.

For sixty nights, Iranians filled the streets, from remote villages to city squares, remaining steadfast. In that collective presence, a profound psychological reconstruction was achieved, fulfilling the martyred Imam's prophecy that God would mobilize the people.

The Iranian people's mobilization successfully neutralized and balanced the forces of political agitation and depression. However, in the New Century, the global rhythm of these psychological swings has accelerated so dramatically that we are likely to witness increasingly intense cases of societal psychological collapse, Ukraine being a current example.

Consider the Iranian opposition. After two decades of advocating for a velvet revolution, a nonviolent popular overthrow, they shifted toward violent methods. When external support from figures like Netanyahu and Trump failed to materialize fully, they fell into a deep political depression. This pattern, I suggest, will repeat itself across the world.

In the United States, a segment of society remains politically agitated, fueled by Trump's perceived failures, while a broader portion of the ruling elite appears depressed and disengaged. In Europe, political structures are increasingly preoccupied with a perceived lack of vitality. Across the Arab world, populations are divided: some are furious with their leaders for failing to defend Palestinian dignity, especially after substantial financial payments to Trump and Netanyahu, while others have lapsed into indifference and depression.

As these dynamics unfold, concepts from strategic psychology, such as the "dose of fascism," political agitation, and political depression, are likely to enter mainstream media discourse with greater frequency. The New Century may well reveal that psychological shocks, engineered agitation, and induced depression can prove more effective than conventional military occupation in destabilizing and bringing down nations.

Iranians possess a deep reservoir of historical experience. By learning from past recoveries, they can effectively "vaccinate" themselves emotionally, fortifying their collective spirit against the psychological fluctuations that threaten to destabilize societies. This, however, requires sustained historical study and the deliberate transmission of these lessons to younger generations.

Host:

You (Dr. Abbasi) have raised several key components of strategic psychology—particularly political agitation and political depression and

briefly traced their historical arc from ancient Greece to Nazi Germany, with more recent illustrations spanning Venezuela, Europe, and the Arab world. Building on that foundation, we now wish to turn our attention to contemporary Iranian history, examining these same dynamics, strategic psychology, agitation, and political depression, through that specific lens.

To guide this discussion, we have invited Dr. Mehdi Tabandeh, an expert in historical studies and strategic psychology whose doctoral thesis was dedicated to this field. Dr. Tabandeh will examine these issues as they have unfolded in Iran's modern history.

Dr. Mehdi Tabandeh:

As Dr. Abbasi noted, the New Century is the century of Islam. Our martyred leader (Imam Khamenei) emphasized that we have entered the second phase of the Islamic Revolution, and the very scale of our civilizational ambitions demands a rigorous examination of the threats facing that civilization. Drawing on studies conducted over the past century, it is evident that humanity, and the Iranian people in particular, oscillates between political vitality and political depression. The asset at stake is nothing less than the people themselves. We must understand them across all their layers: from individuals, to parties, to the state, because even states can succumb to political depression. And when political depression reaches the level of civilization, the consequences become profoundly difficult to manage. It is therefore essential to identify when this condition emerges, recognize its symptoms, and develop methods for prevention and treatment.

In engaging with the thought system of the martyred leader, I first encountered his remarks from 1989, in which he warned that the enemy invests heavily in sowing despair among the youth. This theme recurred throughout the 2010s, when he repeatedly emphasized the necessity of the "jihad of the spirit" (jihad al-ruhiyya)—the inner spiritual struggle—precisely because the enemy seeks to destroy the morale of nations. In 2014, he articulated this principle with particular force: when a nation comes to believe that it cannot succeed, that conviction marks the beginning of its defeat. Even in the absence of a proximate enemy, the internal belief in incapacity paralyzes a people, leaving them to sit with hands tied.

In late 2015, the Leader cautioned the Assembly of Experts to remain vigilant and not overlook social reactions. A decade later, in Feb 2026, the Leader was martyred. The national project of revolutionary leadership, what might be termed religious democracy, has sustained the gradual growth of the people. Should a sudden wave of political depression empty that project of its vitality, the consequences would be catastrophic.

The leader's remedy in such moments centered on a theocentric orientation (aqba-centered approach): trust in God is paramount. For the believer, even adverse events do not lead to despair, because worldly failure is not spiritual defeat. The believer remains connected to God, and God's cause does not fail.

In politics, the central issue is power. When adversaries attack to seize power, a society's belief in its own capability is placed at risk. Political contests produce winners and losers, and losers must be psychologically prepared for defeat, either through prior conditioning that inoculates them against collapse or through a post-defeat process of shock, grief, and eventual recovery or prolonged depression.

Consider the 2009 sedition (Fitna-1388). Those who engineered the protests had not socially engineered their supporters for the possibility of defeat. They failed to prepare them psychologically for loss, and this omission was later acknowledged as a major regret. By contrast, Hezbollah political party in Lebanon accepted defeat in 2009 parliamentary electoral contest and managed to recover in subsequent cycles. The lesson is clear: leaders must prepare their followers for both outcomes—victory and defeat alike.

If followers are not psychologically prepared for defeat, the shock can be overwhelming, potentially triggering complete psychological collapse. A telling historical example is the martyrdom of Imam Khamenei; an event the enemy had targeted precisely to induce political depression among his followers. When the news broke, initial denial gave way to profound shock; for much of the first day, until noon, people remained stunned, gathering in search of collective understanding and shared solace.

In the era of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), when rumors of his death spread during the Battle of Uhud, the community nearly disintegrated. But the cry, "The Prophet is alive", and the subsequent revelations affirming that prophets may be killed while God's plan endures, restored morale and reestablished faith.

A similar dynamic unfolded after the leader's martyrdom. The first 36 to 48 hours were the critical window of shock, followed by a rapid mobilization. I personally witnessed this transition on live television in Arak during the second night. The active chanting and unified presence of the people visibly broke the wave of political depression. The lesson is clear: leadership and trusted figures can short-circuit a depression wave, provided they act swiftly and decisively.

Political depression has manifested repeatedly throughout history. The fall of Mohammad Mossadegh (Note 4), for instance, drove some of his supporters to suicide while many of his loyalists simply abandoned political life altogether. Such episodes are especially dangerous when groups are unprepared for recovery. Left untreated, political depression can produce what might be called a "wave of the walking dead": a state of profound indifference, loss of political agency, low civic participation, and the gradual draining of a society's potential, often accelerated by a small fraction of cynical actors who exploit the vacuum.

Wars are major generators of political depression. Following defeat, societies may never fully recover psychologically. Japan's depression after the atomic bombings; France's lingering trauma after its rapid occupation by Hitler left the French notoriously difficult to amuse, are telling examples.

Revolutions, too, produce depression on the losing side. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, monarchists fell into a prolonged political depression, with many emigrating to Los Angeles. The left, nationalists, and other groups experienced successive waves of depression at different junctures throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as various factions suffered long-term psychological decline.

Coups such as the 1953 overthrow of Mossadegh produced similarly devastating effects. Those in Mossadegh's inner circle were shattered, and many withdrew from political life for decades.

Political depression, in turn, bled into culture and the arts. In the years following the coup, Iranian poetry and music took on a profound melancholy- evident, for example, in the work of Mehdi Akhavan Sales. Film and literature likewise turned toward themes of bleak futures and existential fatigue.

Nor did the sciences and academia escape unscathed. Scientific disappointments, along with critiques of foundational theories as delusional, generated a distinct academic depression. The once-dominant belief that science would resolve all human problems was severely undermined, not least by crises such as the recent pandemic. This has produced a malaise that now pervades universities across the globe.

Revolutions and counterrevolutions alike can trigger prolonged political depressions. In Egypt, the fall of Mubarak, the brief ascendancy of Morsi, and the subsequent military coup produced a lasting silence from the Muslim Brotherhood. This sequence of events cast a deep depression over Egyptian society, one that has persisted for decades, and effectively eradicated what had once been a thriving intellectual current.

Elections, too, can produce political depression, losers must be psychologically prepared to accept defeat and return stronger in future contests. Major national projects, such as the JCPOA (Note 5), represent significant stress points. When leaders fail to provide viable alternatives, populations are liable to fall into despair.

The leader's approach offered multiple pathways: a theocentric orientation (aqba-centered), grounding resilience in trust in God, and practical alternative plans, including economic resistance and reliance on internal capabilities. This dual strategy prevented the people from being trapped in a single-path mentality.

Political actors bear a responsibility to psychologically prepare their supporters, developing "thick skin" and cultivating vaccine-like resilience against future shocks. Some personalities, like Berlusconi or Trump, appear naturally resilient, which serves as a form of prevention. But beyond individual temperament, the broader task is to train politicians and citizens alike to absorb setbacks without collapsing.

During the recent war, the enemy sought to push Iranians into political depression through a sustained campaign of shock and terror, employing multiple atrocities, from the downing of a civilian airliner

decades ago to the targeting of children in Minab. The intent was to spread fear and deepen despair.

Yet the strategy backfired. Instead of succumbing to depression, the population mobilized; instead of retreating, resilience deepened. The enemy miscalculated. The very shocks designed to produce political depression have, in fact, generated renewed political vitality among believers and defenders of the nation.

Anthropologically, political depression produces a profound confusion within the human heart, one's loves and aversions become entangled, internal coherence fragments, and the individual can no longer provide clear answers to their own questions. When depression reaches the deepest layers of being, touching religion, faith, and moral action, it can transform people toward rebellion and tyranny.

Historically, however, a different pattern has also unfolded. The chain of martyrdoms and other shocks, the martyrdom of Qassem Soleimani, the coronavirus pandemic, and subsequent political losses, appear to have followed a divine pattern, preparing the nation for a greater purpose. Rather than breaking hearts, these events purified and strengthened them, rendering the people ready for what lay ahead. The "aqba-centered" (theocentric) perspective discerns God's hand in such trials, understanding them as tests designed to spiritually prepare nations for their appointed roles.

Symptoms of political depression include the abandonment of activities, drastic shifts in interests, angry reactions when confronted, and in extreme cases, physical suicide, as seen in historical figures. Political depression can also drive individuals to abruptly change their political allegiances.

To counter these tendencies, two strategies are essential: a theocentric orientation, grounding resilience in trust in God, and the cultivation of resilient generations through what might be called "thick-skinned" politics, equipping people to absorb shocks without losing their bearings.

During the recent year-long conflict, several significant developments unfolded. The enemy had anticipated that, following the January 8 and 9, 2026 incidents, the opposition would flood the streets and topple the Islamic republic. But the nation did not fall into depression. On the contrary, the chain of martyrdoms and the subsequent mobilizations only strengthened popular morale.

The violence of January 8 and 9, 2026 brought together monarchists and MEK (Note 6) elements in a brutal coalition, born of their shared long-term political depression. Yet the people responded on 22 Bahman (Feb 11, 2026, anniversary of the Islamic revolution) and 22 Esfand (March 10, 2026) with massive turnouts, far exceeding all expectations.

Today, the opposition's inner and outer circles are in disarray. They see the people still present, still engaged, and they are at a loss: why are they not exhausted? In response, they have retreated to online vitriol and

desperate efforts to rationalize their failure. Their slogans have shifted from direct overthrow to vague calls for "erosion", a clear sign that they lack any coherent strategy.

(The opposition's confusion, in fact, is part of a larger regional drama—one in which two distinct tendencies are now clearly visible).

Two contrasting regional tendencies have emerged. On one side, those committed to the resistance front, from Gaza to Yemen to Lebanon, have experienced heightened political vitality and confidence, often asking why they should not strike back. On the other side, nationalist currents in the region that placed their trust in the United States have endured humiliation and defeats and are now drifting into political depression.

In the New Century, strategic psychology will reveal many rapid oscillations between these poles. Students of political science would therefore do well to study political depression in Iranian history, a vast and largely untapped field of research, with a growing body of literature and scholarly resources.

Funding

None.

Note 1: Spiritual struggle was quoted by prophet Muhammad as the struggle against one's own beliefs, desires and practices.

Note 2: "Strategic psychology" functions primarily as an analytical framework rather than a formal academic discipline. Its intellectual foundations draw substantially from political psychology, behavioural economics (Hertwig, Michie, West & Reicher, 2025), and strategic studies (Freedman, 2021). More recently, the field has been enriched by scholarship on geostrategic psychology (Jiang, 2023) and strategic psychological warfare (Pashentsev, n.d.).

Note 3: a tendency toward or actual exercise of strong autocratic or dictatorial control

Note 4: On August 19, 1953, Mohammad Mossadegh, the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran, was removed from power via a coordinated intelligence operation—codenamed Operation Ajax—carried out by the American CIA and British MI6.

Note 5: The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a 2015 multilateral agreement aimed to limit Iran's nuclear program.

Note 6: Mojahedin-khalgh (MEK) is a terrorist group. For a quick look at this cult, follow this investigative article:

<https://theintercept.com/2020/03/22/mek-mojahedin-e-khalq-iran/>

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