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## Stop the Revolution, Michael Jackson is Dead!

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## Stop the Revolution, Michael Jackson is Dead!

### Abstract

We won't soon forget the rapid fire pace of "tweets" and Facebook posts direct from the streets of Tehran. The haunting images of Neda Agha Soltan shocked the consciences of hundreds of thousands around the globe as it went "viral."

### Keywords

Human rights, Social media, Dissemination of information, Propaganda, Iran

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## **Stop the Revolution, Michael Jackson is Dead!**

by William Paul Simmons

We won't soon forget the rapid fire pace of "tweets" and Facebook posts direct from the streets of Tehran. The haunting images of Neda Agha Soltan shocked the consciences of hundreds of thousands around the globe as it went "viral."

Once again, a new technology promises to give power to the people; to bring down dictators, and restore human rights. Twitter and its fellow traveler Facebook now join a long litany of information sources—newspapers, pamphlets, television, cell phones, the Internet—that have promised to change the world. Each was believed to be the ideal technology for sowing the seeds of democracy in every nook and cranny around the globe. And certainly each has played a role and should be in the arsenal of every social movement. But those who herald new technologies as game changers under-estimate how adept the hegemonic system is at co-opting technologies for its own purposes. At the end of the day the old rules still apply. The politics of improving human rights remains a long, hard struggle with many risks.

Attention-grabbing technologies like Twitter and Facebook appeal best to consumers with attention deficits. The green revolution in Tehran ended for all intents and purposes when the deaths of Farrah Fawcett and Michael Jackson sucked the air out of the media window. The consumer's attention shifted to the latest cause célèbre. After all the fury, what do most viewers remember of the green revolution? Do they better understand the Iranian people, their culture, their needs? Do they better comprehend the geo-political complexities of the region? Clearly, these new technologies, especially those limited to 140 characters, lack context and follow through.

More tweets will not release those rounded up for sending tweets. More Facebook posts will not release those imprisoned for having Facebook "cookies" on their hard drives. It will take old-fashioned politics and social movements, and not just snippets of information and images. More street protests are needed. And these need to be supplemented by the firm use of diplomacy and behind the scenes power brokering.

But each of these is also fraught with danger.

Real change will take leaders willing to tackle the messy job of coalition building. It will take leaders willing to see beyond self-interest and be ready to risk their lives for the good of the country and its people. If successful it will someday make a wonderful story on YouTube.

We won't soon forget the rapid fire pace of Internet images direct from the streets of Rangoon. The haunting images of attacks on peaceful Buddhist monks shocked the consciences of hundreds of thousands around the globe as it went "viral." And yet the Burmese ruling Junta remains firmly in power.

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