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USADI Commentary

Enter "the Shark"

On June 17, Iran's theocratic regime will hold a sham presidential election, which, like all other such theatrics, carries no semblance of the democratic process. Hundreds may nominate themselves, but as one election official said, the few whose absolute loyalty to the system is rock solid will be allowed to run.

Among them is the former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, nicknamed "shark" by Iranians.

After eight years of shameless capitulation to the rival faction the so-called reformist faction of President Mohammad Khatami is now turned into a hapless bunch despised by the Iranians and ejected from circles of power.

If there were any doubt that Khatami's faction indeed has been serving the interest of fundamentalist regime, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, removed all doubt on Monday, saying that both factions were "the components of the Islamic Republic" and loyal to the Constitution. The two camps were "two wings for flying upward to progress," he added. Translation: Both factions are bent on preserving the clerical system and its theocratic Constitution.

What about the candidates? Increasingly vulnerable in the face of the rising popular unrest and under international pressure to dismantle its nuclear program, the ruling clerical establishment has opened the door to a notorious member of the old guard, Rafsanjani, who has announced his intentions to run in what is expected to be a rehash of a disastrous eight-year tenure immediately after Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989.

With a Mafia-type stranglehold on many important businesses and industries in Iran, Rafsanjani was utterly disgraced when he failed to win a seat from Tehran during the sham parliamentary elections in February 2000.

As Khomeini's chief advisor, he ran the devastating Iran-Iraq war that left millions of casualties, hundreds of billions of dollars of material losses and millions of displaced persons. Rafsanjani also oversaw the mass killings of political opponents in the 1980s and the serial assassinations of dissidents abroad, for which he was implicated by a Berlin court in 1997.

The Khobar Tower bombing of 1996 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in which 19 American servicemen lost their lives, was planned and carried out under his watch. And, last, but not least, he has been the architect of Iran's secret drive for nuclear weapons since early 1990s.

His PR campaign has already begun and familiar foreign journalists have been traveling to Tehran to interview him. Again the misnomers such as "moderate" or "pragmatic" are heaped on this cunning mullah by an array of Iranian analysts whose political umbilical cords with the establishment remain intact. One can also feel the hype in certain Washington media and policy circles, which promised a Tehran spring the last time Rafsanjani became President.

So, the artificial drama to heat up an otherwise boring pre-election soap opera continues with Rafsanjani doing his version of playing hard to get. "I had no choice but to swallow the bitter pill of becoming a candidate," he said when announcing his intention to run.

Meanwhile, his unofficial campaign stumps have been disastrous. His appearance on a May Day gathering in a sport stadium in Tehran was canceled due to intense anti-Rafsanjani protests in advance of his speech.

If the February 2004 parliamentary election is any indication, even fewer voters will cast their ballots. Those prospects, however, are not going to stop the ruling clique from their usual spin and fraud game. With the vote more than a month away, Intelligence Minister Ali Younessi has already boasted that fifty-percent of the population will go the polls come June 17.

The obvious message of the June election, however, is that the clerical regime has arrived at a dead-end and the best it can field is a terror-monger, despicable tyrant named Rafsanjani.

Washington is wise to keep that in mind when formulating a sound policy toward Tehran. **(USADI)**

The US Alliance for Democratic Iran (USADI), is an independent, non-profit organization, which aims to advance a US policy on Iran that will benefit America's interests, through supporting Iranian people's aspirations for a democratic, secular, and peaceful government, free of tyranny, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. The USADI is not affiliated with any government agencies, political groups or parties.

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The Washington Times
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Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran

You may have missed it, but sometime this spring, the Bush administration decided to subcontract its Iran strategy to Europe. In late February, in a dramatic reversal of its long-standing assertion that the United States will not negotiate with Iran over its nuclear ambitions, the White House unexpectedly announced that it was siding with the "EU 3" — France, Germany and Great Britain — in their efforts to diplomatically stall Tehran's atomic advances. Among the diplomatic and economic carrots now being proffered to Iran's ayatollahs by the Bush administration are a lifting of American opposition to Iran's accession to the World Trade Organization and the provision of aeronautical components for Iran's aging fleet of airliners.

What lies behind this new engagement? It is certainly not that the White House has gone soft on Iran. Administration officials continue to maintain that Iran is covertly pursuing an atomic capability, and have flatly rejected Iranian proposals to retain the means for limited uranium enrichment. Yet, in the absence of a coherent policy designed to thwart Iran's atomic ambitions, American officials have steadily drifted toward Europe's brand of diplomacy. There are at least three reasons why such an approach is fraught with peril.

The first relates to timing. By signing on to the European diplomatic track, the Bush administration has implicitly embraced France, Germany and Great Britain's schedule for dealing with Iran. Such a step is highly problematic...

Another timetable is also in play. With Iran's current "reformist" president, Mohammed Khatami, constitutionally barred from seeking re-election once his term in office expires, international pressure is mounting to delay any sort of decisive diplomatic or military response until after Iranians go to the polls in June — even if Iran demonstrates bad faith in its negotiations with Europe in the interim. Moreover, under this rationale, Iran's new president will need time to craft a cabinet, assume control of the country's sprawling bureaucracy and formulate his own stance on Iran's nuclear program — a process that could take additional weeks, if not months. All of this means that a concerted trans-Atlantic policy toward the Islamic Republic will not materialize until substantially later in 2005, at the earliest. In the meantime, the Iranian regime acquires valuable breathing room to forge ahead with its nuclear development.

The second reason has to do with style. Despite earnest European denials, the current EU-3 negotiating track is not a new effort. It bears a remarkable resemblance to an earlier European attempt to cajole Iran into giving up its WMD programs and support for terrorism through economic inducements. That initiative, dubbed "critical dialogue," fizzled in 1997, but not before providing Iran with much-needed economic assistance and the political cover necessary to continue its rogue behavior...

The third relates to objectives. The Bush administration has previously declared that it "will not tolerate" a nuclear Iran. Yet just such a development now appears to be under serious consideration by American allies in Europe. In recent days, Britain, France and Germany, stymied by Iranian intransigence, have reportedly begun contemplating a compromise deal that would enable the Islamic Republic to retain nuclear technology that could be used in the development of an offensive nuclear arsenal. Such a move is anathema to American objectives, and if implemented would decisively dash hopes for any sort of consensus between the United States and Europe.

Sooner or later, though, Washington is likely to grasp that such reasoning increasingly constitutes the triumph of hope over experience. And when the White House does get serious, it will discover that there is no substitute for an independent American strategy toward the Islamic Republic — one that is designed to deter, contain and ultimately transform the regime in Tehran.

Excerpts from a commentary by Ilan Berman, vice president for policy of the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington and author of the forthcoming Tehran Rising: Iran's Challenge to the United States.

The New York Sun
May 10, 2005
Secret Iranian Nuclear Weapons Program Suspected

WASHINGTON -- A secret, parallel military program to produce nuclear weapons may be behind Iran's announcement yesterday that it will break its agreement to suspend uranium enrichment. Western intelligence agencies, including the CIA, suspect the Islamic republic has been hiding the program from the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspectors...

A Western diplomat with access to sensitive real-time intelligence told The New York Sun yesterday that America, Israel, and some European intelligence services have concluded recently that a pattern of procurement and technical training arrangements strongly suggests the existence of a second nuclear program in Iran...

The executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, Henry Sokolski, told the Sun yesterday that there is a growing consensus that the Iranians have a secret parallel program. "Other allied governments have raised this specter based on their assessment of their intelligence. This is not just the Israelis, the United States, and Italy," he said...