

USADI Dispatch

A publication of the U.S. Alliance for Democratic Iran

Volume 2, No. 23

Thursday, June 23, 2005

USADI Commentary

A Lose-Lose Outcome for Tyranny Ruling Iran

Regardless of the outcome in tomorrow's second round of presidential elections in Iran, the electoral farce marks a grave defeat for the ruling tyranny and a huge win for Iran's democracy movement that is seeking fundamental change in Iran.

The first round last Friday unmasked the utter failure of the clerical regime as a system of governance and revealed the deep infighting within the ruling clique. Charges of rigging leveled by influential regime's insiders against the Supreme Leader sent deadly ideological and political tremors within the regime.

The sham election, the litmus test of the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic, was a disaster. Already tainted as a travesty of the democratic process, the election suffered from a nationwide boycott. Fraud, inflating the final vote tally, and staging—managing at a few polling stations to impress foreign journalists failed to overshadow the boycott.

The mullahs' obsession with high turnout proved that elections, as every other such exercise, are more about giving an illegitimate regime the appearance of legitimacy. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei echoes as much when casting his vote: "When we come to the polling stations to cast our votes..., it means we are voting for the Islamic system." It was not without reason that the only issue all eight candidates agree upon before the vote was the need for a huge turnout.

The election's most significant result with huge policy ramifications for the United States and the European capitals is perhaps the fact that it revealed how futureless and severely fractured the regime is along its factional fissures. The fragile factional balance has been shattered.

When the supreme leader Ali Khamenei becomes the subject of direct public attacks by the most influential establishment figures, the whole regime is undermined. Therefore, no matter whom wins this Friday's second round of elections, the damage done is irreversible and the factional divisions will only grow fiercer in the next four years.

By painting Ahmadinejad as a bogymen, many in the West are urging Iranians to vote for Hashemi Rafsanjani, because they consider him as being the "lesser" of the "two evils."

They should be reminded that for all his vices, Ahmadinejad was a petty functionary of the policy of liquidating dissent in and out of Iran, put into effect under Rafsanjani's watch in the 1990s.

The choice between a cunning terror-master like Rafsanjani and a ruthless terrorist like Ahmadinejad, truly epitomizes the futility of elections as a means to achieve change in a theocracy that is an anathema to change. It also makes a strong case for reaching out to the democratic opposition that has been striving to bring about fundamental change in Iran.

In Iran presidential elections are meaningless in terms of being the manifestation of popular will. The resultant political balance among various factions, which lacks any semblance of partisan rivalries in multi-party systems, sets the political course in the country and not the elections. Therefore, the EU would be wise not put its money on Rafsanjani.

Last week, President George W. Bush strongly and appropriately denounced the sham election in Iran. "Today, Iran is ruled by men who suppress liberty at home and spread terror across the world. Power is in the hands of an unelected few who have retained power through an electoral process that ignores the basic requirements of democracy", he said.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice added, "The appearance of elections does not mask the organized cruelty of Iran's theocratic state. The Iranian people are capable of liberty. They desire liberty. And they deserve liberty. The time has come for the unelected few to release their grip on the aspirations of the proud people of Iran."

The election dealt a crippling blow to Trans Atlantic's justification for appeasing the clerical regime, giving urgency to the need in Washington to formulate a viable policy that would include recognizing the organized democratic opposition in Iran. **(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.

1201 Pennsylvania Ave, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20004

Tel: 202-661-4675, Fax: 202-318-0402, E-mail: dispatch@usadIran.org

The Baltimore Sun

June 23, 2005

Radical rebound in Iran

THREE YEARS ago, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was a relative political unknown in Iran. But now, the 49-year-old hard-liner - a former commander in Iran's universally feared clerical army, the Pasdaran, and more recently the mayor of Tehran - has become one of the Islamic Republic's most recognizable faces.

In Friday's presidential election, the gruff, unpolished Mr. Ahmadinejad leapfrogged ahead of five more prominent candidates - including former Science and Education Minister Mostafa Moin, the favorite of Iran's reformist camp - to secure a spot in the presidential runoff set for tomorrow.

Mr. Ahmadinejad's rise was almost certainly stage-managed by Iran's clerical leadership, led by the country's supreme leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. At least two other presidential candidates, including former Parliament Speaker Mehdi Karroubi, have alleged widespread fraud and governmental interference in the elections. Nevertheless, Mr. Ahmadinejad's ascendancy is deeply significant since it mirrors a deeper political shift taking place within Iranian politics...

Signs of this re-entrenchment are everywhere. After the resounding victory of regime conservatives during Iran's hotly contested February 2004 parliamentary elections, nearly one-third of Iran's 290 parliamentary deputies now have links to Iran's military complex and 42 are directly affiliated with the Pasdaran...

The Pasdaran's agenda is global in scope, and so is its reach. Over the past 25 years, it has served as the shock troops of the Islamic revolution, training terrorist organizations in Iran and in specialized training camps in places such as Lebanon and Sudan. It similarly has provided assistance to radical movements and terrorist proxies throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Asia.

But the Pasdaran occupies another role as well: guardian of the regime's strategic programs. Following its final test in June 2003, Iran's premier ballistic missile, the medium-range Shahab-3, was handed over with great fanfare to the Pasdaran by the Defense Ministry. Iran's chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs are similarly in the hands of the clerical army. (Indeed, the prestige of the Pasdaran has grown exponentially as a result of Iran's drawn-out diplomatic jockeying with the United States, Britain, France and Germany over its nuclear ambitions.)

Since the Pasdaran serves as the regime's principal point of contact with terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, this nexus raises the alarming possibility that Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile advances could eventually translate into substantial terrorist gains...

But regardless of who ultimately ascends to the presidency, Mr. Ahmadinejad's breakout performance is alarming proof of the Pasdaran's rising power and that the radical principles underpinning Iran's Islamic revolution are getting a new lease on life.

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

The Boston Globe

June 23, 2005

Iranian travesty

Iran's presidential elections, which are scheduled to culminate in a decisive second round of voting tomorrow, are being denounced by some of the candidates themselves as a travesty of electoral politics. The manipulations attributed to hardline forces in the military and the clerical establishment reflect a determined drive by those archconservatives to monopolize all power centers in Iran.

Iranians longing for genuine democracy, pluralism, and equal rights for women will have to work out their own ways of outlasting the corrupt, repressive clerics ruling over them. Perhaps the soundest way for the outside world to show solidarity with Iranians thirsting for true democracy is to emulate their refusal to be duped by the ruses of the theocrats who hoard all true power in Iran's Islamic Republic.

Hardliners in the entourage of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the Guardian Council, and the Revolutionary Guards have been castigated by reformers for rigging vote counts in last week's first round of balloting. The result of their flagrant cheating was to elevate the mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a hardline loyalist of Khamenei and former Revolutionary Guard commander, from also-ran to second-round challenger of former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani...

This is the age-old voice of the absolute ruler. Whether Khamenei and his cronies are scheming to place Ahmadinejad in the presidency or are using him to frighten people who distrust Rafsanjani into voting for the former president as the lesser of two evils, the most retrogressive forces in Iran are stamping out the popular hope for democratic reform.