

America Threatens Iran: The Anti-war Movement's Trojan Horse

Two petitions, two approaches toward defending Iran

By [Phil Wilayto](#)

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After a period in which defending Iran hasn't been very high on the agenda of most U.S. anti-war activists, there are now two petition campaigns opposing war and sanctions against Iran.

One effort is led by a New York City-based organization more known for defending Cuban "dissidents" who openly take U.S. money to try to undermine the Cuban Revolution. The other was launched by an independent Tehran-based organization formed to promote Iranian solidarity with Cuba, Venezuela and other progressive countries in Latin America.

Curiously, it's the first campaign that seems to be getting the most support.

The first petition is the product of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, an outfit formed in 1982 as the Campaign for Peace and Democracy/East and West, with the goal of promoting anti-socialist movements in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. While claiming to oppose injustice in both the U.S. and in countries targeted by Washington, its campaigns are virtually all directed at undermining governments under attack by Western powers.

In the case of Cuba, the CPD went to bat for about 75 Cuban dissidents imprisoned in 2003, some of whom had openly accepted money from the U.S. for counterrevolutionary activities. Here is how the CPD itself described the 75:

"Many of them, as well as other Cuban dissidents, have met with James Cason, head of the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba, and some have received duplicating materials, funding or other resources directly from the U.S. government or from NGOs funded by Washington." (1)

The CPD takes the same approach toward Iran, stating that "We too would like to see a regime change in Tehran, but one brought about by the Iranian people themselves, not by Washington." (2)

Like Cuba, Iran isn't targeted by the U.S. because of any issue of democracy or human rights. (Both the U.S. and the CPD are stunningly silent about human rights abuses in U.S. client states like Saudi Arabia or Honduras.) Instead, it's because, like Cuba, Iran refuses to go along with the dictates of the Empire, a dangerous position to take anywhere, but especially in the oil-rich Middle East.

So it's not surprising that the CPD includes this line in its petition opposing war and

sanctions against Iran: “We support those who struggle for democracy and social justice inside Iran.”

The statement may seem innocuous enough, what does it really mean?

In the West, we’re told there are two sides in Iran: the people, and a repressive government. Period.

What we’re not told is that the major division in Iranian society today is class. While the major industries like gas and oil are owned by the government, there is a substantial private sector with its own economic and political agenda, and it is this sector that is the social basis for the anti-government movement. Even the Western media admits that it was mainly the middle and upper classes that supported last year’s main presidential challenger, Mir Hossein Mousavi, and the protests that followed the 2009 election, while it’s the poor and the working class that provide the political support for the administration of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Surely, many of those who took to the streets in Tehran and other cities were motivated by a sincere belief that the election was unfair, and also wanted a loosening of what they saw as social and political restrictions. And some of these suffered unjustly for taking part in the protests, as both President Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have admitted.

But there also are other forces opposing the Iranian government.

There are the royalists, who want to bring back a Shah. There are the armed groups that carry out attacks on government forces, such as the PKK in the Northwest, Jundallah in the Southeast and the MKO, which until recently operated with virtual U.S. protection from bases in Iraq. Even though some of these organizations have been exposed as receiving substantial financial and military support from the U.S. (3), they all claim to be promoting “democracy and social justice.”

Then there are the ideological elements in the “pro-democracy” movement that promote a bona fide neocon program of privatization, deregulation and massive cuts in social services.

And there’s the matter of the tens of millions of dollars spent by first the Bush/Cheney and now Obama administrations to support Iranian “dissidents.” (4)

The CPD petition in effect asks U.S. activists to declare their unconditional support for all these forces, without distinction.

This isn’t the first time the CPD has tried to promote its politics in the anti-war arena. Its petition is based on a resolution that the organization unsuccessfully introduced at the mass anti-war conference held this past July in Albany, New York. That gathering, called the United National Anti-War Conference (UNAC), was attended by 750 activists representing virtually every anti-war organization in the country, making it the largest peace conference held in the U.S. in decades.

The CPD resolution, which condemned the Ahmadinejad government along with war and sanctions, was defeated by a 2-1 margin, after the conference attendees accepted the argument that it wasn’t the role of the U.S. movement to take sides on internal matters in

Iran.

Instead, a resolution against war and sanctions initiated by the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality and co-sponsored by the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the International Action Center, a resolution that purposely did not address internal issues in Iran, passed unanimously.

Just as there was an alternative to the CPD resolution at the Albany conference, there is now an alternative to the CPD petition.

In mid-October, a nongovernmental organization in Iran called House of Latin America, or HOLA, invited several anti-imperialist organizations from the U.S. to Tehran with the goal for building the movement against war and sanctions against Iran. Among those who attended were representatives of the International Action Center, ANSWER Coalition, Toronto Coalition Against the War and the American Iranian Friendship Committee.

HOLA was started about five years ago to promote solidarity with the peoples of Latin America. Its activities have included organizing solidarity trips to Nicaragua and Venezuela, hosting a talk by Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, translating a book by Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and facilitating a visit to Iran by the son and daughter of Che Guevara to participate in a commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Che's death.

HOLA proposed setting up a new campaign called Solidarity with Iran or SI, which is promoting its own petition. This one spends more time detailing U.S. threats to Iran, defends Iran's right to develop nuclear power for peaceful energy purposes and doesn't take a position on Iran's "pro-democracy" movement.

U.S. progressives who want to add their voices to the movement to oppose war and sanctions against Iran would do well to look into who is promoting which campaigns, and why. Otherwise, we can risk squandering our limited political capital in the service of those whose goals are diametrically opposed to our own.

The CPD petition can be found at <http://www.cpdweb.org/stmts/1015/stmt.shtml>.

A copy of the HOLA petition has been posted by the Defenders at <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/si-dfje>.)

Phil Wilayto is a longtime community and anti-war activist based in Richmond, Virginia. He is editor of The Virginia Defender newspaper and author of "In Defense of Iran: Notes from a U.S. Peace Delegation's Journey through the Islamic Republic." (www.DefendersFJE.org/dpi). He can be reached at DefendersFJE@hotmail.com.

Notes

1 - "Statement Protesting Repression in Cuba" - <http://www.cpdweb.org/stmts/1002/stmt.shtml>)

2 - "Iran: Neither U.S. Aggression nor the Theocratic Repression - A call for a new, democratic U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East" - <http://www.cpdweb.org/stmts/1005/stmt.shtml>

3 - "Preparing the Battlefield: The Bush administration steps up its secret moves against Iran" - The New Yorker, July 7, 2008 - http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/07/07/080707fa_fact_hersh

4 - "U.S. grants support to Iranian dissidents" - USA Today, June 28, 2009 - http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2009-06-25-iran-money_N.htm

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