

Iran elections: Much ado about nothing?

Ahmadinejad, is a Washington ODE, an Officially Designated Enemy

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What is there about the Iranian election of June 12 that has led to it being one of the leading stories in media around the world every day since? Elections whose results are seriously challenged have taken place in most countries at one time or another in recent decades. Countless Americans believe that the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 were stolen by the Republicans, and not just inside the voting machines and in the counting process, but prior to the actual voting as well with numerous Republican Party dirty tricks designed to keep poor and black voters off voting lists or away from polling stations. The fact that large numbers of Americans did not take to the streets day after day in protest, as in Iran, is not something we can be proud of. Perhaps if the CIA, the Agency for International Development (AID), several US government-run radio stations, and various other organizations supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (which was created to serve as a front for the CIA, literally) had been active in the United States, as they have been for years in Iran, major street protests would have taken place in the United States.

The classic “outside agitators” can not only foment dissent through propaganda, adding to already existing dissent, but they can serve to mobilize the public to strongly demonstrate against the government. In 1953, when the CIA overthrew Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, they paid people to agitate in front of Mossadegh’s residence and elsewhere and engage in acts of violence; some pretended to be supporters of Mossadegh while engaging in anti-religious actions. And it worked, remarkably well.¹ Since the end of World War II, the United States has seriously intervened in some 30 elections around the world, adding a new twist this time, twittering. The State Department asked Twitter to postpone a scheduled maintenance shutdown of its service to keep information flowing from inside Iran, helping to mobilize protesters.² The *New York Times* reported: “An article published by the Web site True/Slant highlighted some of the biggest errors on Twitter that were quickly repeated and amplified by bloggers: that three million protested in Tehran last weekend (more like a few hundred thousand); that the opposition candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi was under house arrest (he was being watched); that the president of the election monitoring committee declared the election invalid last Saturday (not so).”³

In recent years, the United States has been patrolling the waters surrounding Iran with warships, halting Iranian ships to check for arms shipments to Hamas or for other illegal reasons, financing and “educating” Iranian dissidents, using Iranian groups to carry out terrorist attacks inside Iran, kidnapping Iranian diplomats in Iraq, kidnapping Iranian military personnel in Iran and taking them to Iraq, continually spying and recruiting within Iran, manipulating Iran’s currency and international financial transactions, and imposing various economic and political sanctions against the country.⁴

"I've made it clear that the United States respects the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and is not at all interfering in Iran's affairs," said US President Barack Obama with a straight face on June 23. Some in the Iranian government [have been] accusing the United States and others outside of Iran of instigating protests over the elections. These accusations are patently false and absurd."[5](#)

"Never believe anything until it's officially denied," British writer Claud Cockburn famously said.

In his world-prominent speech to the Middle East on June 4, Obama mentioned that "In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government." So we have the president of the United States admitting to a previous overthrow of the Iranian government while the United States is in the very midst of trying to overthrow the current Iranian government. This will serve as the best example of hypocrisy that's come along in quite a while.

So why the big international fuss over the Iranian election and street protests? There's only one answer. The obvious one. The announced winner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is a Washington ODE, an Officially Designated Enemy, for not sufficiently respecting the Empire and its Israeli partner-in-crime; indeed, Ahmadinejad is one of the most outspoken critics of US foreign policy in the world.

So ingrained is this ODE response built into Washington's world view that it appears to matter not at all that Mousavi, Ahmadinejad's main opponent in the election and very much supported by the protesters, while prime minister 1981-89, bore large responsibility for the attacks on the US embassy and military barracks in Beirut in 1983, which took the lives of more than 200 Americans, and the 1988 truck bombing of a US Navy installation in Naples, Italy, that killed five persons. Remarkably, a search of US newspaper and broadcast sources shows no mention of this during the current protests.[6](#) However, the Washington Post saw fit to run a story on June 27 that declared: "the authoritarian governments of China, Cuba and Burma have been selectively censoring the news this month of Iranian crowds braving government militias on the streets of Tehran to demand democratic reforms."

Can it be that no one in the Obama administration knows of Mousavi's background? And do none of them know about the violent government repression on June 5 in Peru of the peaceful protests organized in response to the US-Peru Free Trade Agreement? A massacre that took the lives of between 20 and 25 indigenous people in the Amazon and wounded another 100.[7](#) The Obama administration was silent on the Peruvian massacre because the Peruvian president, Alan Garcia, is not an ODE.

And neither is Mousavi, despite his anti-American terrorist deeds, because he's opposed to Ahmadinejad, who competes with Hugo Chavez to be Washington's Number One ODE. Time magazine calls Mousavi a "moderate", and goes on to add: "It has to be assumed that the Iranian presidential election was rigged," offering as much evidence as the Iranian protestors, i.e., none at all.[8](#) It cannot of course be proven that the Iranian election was totally honest, but the arguments given to support the charge of fraud are not very impressive, such as the much-repeated fact that the results were announced very soon after the polls closed. For decades in various countries election results have been condemned for being withheld for many hours or days. Some kind of dishonesty must be going on behind the scenes during the long delay it was argued. So now we're asked to believe that some kind of dishonesty must be going on because the results were released so quickly. It should

be noted that the ballots listed only one electoral contest, with but four candidates.

Phil Wilayto, American peace activist and author of a book on Iran, has observed:

Ahmadinejad, himself born into rural poverty, clearly has the support of the poorer classes, especially in the countryside, where nearly half the population lives. Why? In part because he pays attention to them, makes sure they receive some benefits from the government and treats them and their religious views and traditions with respect. Mousavi, on the other hand, the son of an urban merchant, clearly appeals more to the urban middle classes, especially the college-educated youth. This being so, why would anyone be surprised that Ahmadinejad carried the vote by a clear majority? Are there now more yuppies in Iran than poor people?[9](#)

All of which is of course not to say that Iran is not a relatively repressive society on social and religious issues, and it's this underlying reality which likely feeds much of the protest; indeed, many of the protesters may not even have strong views about the election per se, particularly since both Ahmadinejad and Mousavi are members of the establishment, neither is any threat to the Islamic theocracy, and the election can be seen as the kind of power struggle you find in virtually every country. But that is not the issue I'm concerned with here. The issue is Washington's long-standing goal of regime change. If the exact same electoral outcome had taken place in a country that is an ally of the United States, how much of all the accusatory news coverage and speeches would have taken place? In fact, the exact same thing did happen in a country that is an ally of the United States, three years ago when Felipe Calderon appeared to have stolen the presidential election in Mexico and there were daily large protests for more than two months; but the American and international condemnation was virtually non-existent compared to what we see today in regard to Iran.

Iranian leaders undertook a recount of a random ten per cent of ballots and recertified Ahmadinejad as the winner. How honest the recount was I have no idea, but it's more than Americans got in 2000 and 2004.

By what standard shall we judge Barack Obama?

Many of my readers have been upset with me for my criticisms of President Obama's policies. Following my last two reports, more than a dozen have asked to be removed from my mailing list. But if you share my view that the numerous atrocities US foreign policy is responsible for constitute the greatest threat to world peace, prosperity and happiness, then I think you have to want leaders who are unambiguously opposed to America's military adventures, because those interventions are unambiguously harmful. There's nothing good to be said about dropping powerful bombs on crowds of innocent people, invading their land, overthrowing their government, occupying the country, breaking down the doors of the citizens, killing the father, raping the mother, traumatizing the children, torturing those opposed to all this ... Barack Obama has no problem with this, if we judge him by his policies and not his rhetoric.

And neither does Al Franken, who's about to become a Democratic Senator from Minnesota. The former Saturday Night Live comedian would like you to believe that he's been against the war in Iraq since it began, but he's gone to Iraq four times to entertain the troops. Does that make sense? Why does the military bring entertainers to soldiers? To lift the soldiers'

spirits. Why does the military want to lift the soldiers' spirits? A happier soldier does his job better. And what's the soldier's job? All the charming things listed above. Doesn't Franken know what these guys do? He criticized the Bush administration because they "failed to send enough troops to do the job right."[10](#) What "job" did the man think the troops were sent to do that had not been performed to his standards because of lack of manpower? Did he want them to be more efficient at killing Iraqis who resisted the occupation?

Franken has been lifting soldiers' spirits for a long time. This past March he was honored by the United Service Organization (USO) for his ten years of entertaining troops abroad. That includes Kosovo in 1999, as imperialist an occupation as you'll want to see. He called his USO experience "one of the best things I've ever done."[11](#) Franken has also spoken at West Point, encouraging the next generation of imperialist warriors. Is this a man to challenge the militarization of America at home and abroad? No more so than Obama.

Tom Hayden wrote this about Franken in 2005 when Franken had a regular program on the Air America radio network:

Is anyone else disappointed with Al Franken's daily defense of the continued war in Iraq? Not Bush's version of the war, because that would undermine Air America's laudable purpose of rallying an anti-Bush audience. But, well, Kerry's version of the war, one that can be better managed and won, somehow with better body armor and fewer torture cells. This morning Franken was endorsing Sen. Joe Biden's proposal to send 5,000 NATO troops to close the Syrian-Iraq border, bring in foreign trainers for the Iraqi officer corps, and put Iraqis to work cleaning up the destruction of our invasion. ... Now that Bush has manipulated us into the invasion, Franken thinks we have no choice but to ... stay until we crush the insurgents. It's a humanitarian excuse for open-ended American occupation. And it's shared widely by the professional political and pundit class who think of themselves as the conscience of the American establishment and the leadership of the Democratic Party.[12](#)

I know, I know, I'm taking away all your heroes. But such people shouldn't be your heroes. You can learn to see through the liberal, Democratic Party apologists for the empire. Only a week ago, documents released by the Nixon Library in California revealed that five days before US and South Vietnamese troops made their surprise invasion of Cambodia on April 29, 1970 — which elicited widespread, angry protests in the US, resulting in the fatal shootings by the National Guard of students at Kent State University in Ohio — President Richard Nixon got approval for the invasion from the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. John Stennis of Mississippi. Stennis told the president: "I will be with you. ... I commend you for what you are doing."[13](#)

Long live the Cold War

President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras was overthrown in a military coup June 28 because he was about to conduct a non-binding survey of the population, asking the question: "Do you agree that, during the general elections of November 2009 there should be a fourth ballot to decide whether to hold a Constituent National Assembly that will approve a new political constitution?" One of the issues that Zelaya hoped a new constitution would deal with is the limiting of the presidency to one four-year term. He also expressed the need for other constitutional changes to make it possible for him to carry out policies to improve the life of the poor; in countries like Honduras, the law is not generally crafted for that end.

At this writing it's not clear how matters will turn out in Honduras, but the following should be noted:

The United States, by its own admission, was fully aware for weeks of the Honduran military's plan to overthrow Zelaya. Washington says it tried its best to change the mind of the plotters. It's difficult to believe that this proved impossible. During the Cold War it was said, with much justification, that the United States could discourage a coup in Latin America with "a frown". The Honduran and American military establishments have long been on very fraternal terms. And it must be asked: In what way and to what extent did the United States warn Zelaya of the impending coup? And what protection did it offer him? The response to the coup from the Obama administration can be described with adjectives such as lukewarm, proper but belated, and mixed. It is not unthinkable that the United States gave the military plotters the go-ahead, telling them to keep the traditional "golpe" bloodiness to a minimum. Zelaya was elected to office as the candidate of a conservative party; he then, surprisingly, moved to the left and became a strong critic of a number of Washington policies, and an ally of Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia, both of whom the Bush administration tried to overthrow and assassinate.

Following the coup, National Public Radio (NPR) showed once again why progressives refer to it as National Pentagon Radio. The station's leading news anchor, Robert Siegel, interviewed Johanna Mendelson Forman, of the conservative think tank, Center for Strategic and International Studies:

Siegel: "There hasn't been a coup in Latin America for quite a while."

Forman: "I think the last one was in 1983"

Siegel did not correct her.[14](#)

This is ignorance of considerable degree. There was a coup in Venezuela in 2002 that briefly overthrew Hugo Chavez, a coup in Haiti in 2004 that permanently overthrew Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and a coup in Panama in 1989 that permanently overthrew Manuel Noriega. Is it because the US was closely involved in all three coups that they have been thrown down the Orwellian Memory Hole?

Notes

1. William Blum, *Killing Hope*, chapter 9 [↵](#)
2. *Associated Press*, June 16, 2009 [↵](#)
3. *New York Times*, June 21, 2009 [↵](#)
4. See Seymour Hersh, *New Yorker* magazine, June 29, 2008; *ABC News*, May 22, 2007; and Paul Craig Roberts in *CounterPunch*, June 19-21, 2009 for descriptions of some of these and other anti-Iran covert activities. [↵](#)
5. White House press conference, June 23, 2009 [↵](#)
6. The only mention is by Jeff Stein in "CQ Politics" [Congressional Quarterly],

online, June 22, 2009, “according to former CIA and military officials”. [↵](#)

7. [Center for International Policy \(Washington, DC\) report, June 16, 2009](#) [↵](#)

8. *Time* magazine, June 29, 2009, p.26 [↵](#)

9. *AlterNet.org*, June 14, 2009; Wilayto is the author of “In Defense of Iran: Notes from a U.S. Peace Delegation’s Journey through the Islamic Republic” [↵](#)

10. *Washington Post*, February 16, 2004 [↵](#)

11. *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), March 26, 2009 [↵](#)

12. *Huffington Post*, sometime in June 2005, but it may no longer be there. [↵](#)

13. *Washington Post*, June 30, 2009 [↵](#)

14. NPR, All Things Considered, June 29, 2009 [↵](#)

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William Blum is the author of:

- *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2*
- *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*
- *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*
- *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*

Portions of the books can be read, and signed copies purchased, at www.killinghope.org

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