

Iran's Election and US - Iranian Relations

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In the run-up to Iran's June 12 presidential election, early indications suggested the media's reaction if the wrong candidate won. On June 7, New York Times writer Robert Worth reported "a surge of energy (for) Mir Hussein Mousavi, a reformist who is the leading contender to defeat Mr. Ahmadinejad (and) a new unofficial poll (has him well ahead) with 54 percent of respondents saying they would vote for him compared with 39 percent for Mr. Ahmadinejad." No mention of who conducted the poll, how it was done, what interests they represented, or if Mousavi winning might be the wrong result. More on that below.

Writing for the influential far right Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Fariborz Ghadar described the contest as "pit(ting) the hard-line Mahmoud Ahmadinejad against two relatively moderate and one conservative challenger." In spite of one or more independent polls showing Ahmadinejad way ahead, he suggested that "the outcome (isn't) all that clear." More on the poll results below.

The Wall Street Journal sounded a similar tone in calling Ahmadinejad's opponents "two reformists and one conservative (who) criticized his government for its lack of tolerance. Each has promised more personal and social freedom if elected."

Newsweek quoted Iranian historian Mohammed Javad Mozafar saying:

"The choice is....between democracy and an authoritarian government. If Ahmadinejad wins, that means the end of this reformist dream for a while. Many of these young people will be depressed and even leave the country. But if Mousavi wins, that means the citizens have won despite Ahmadinejad's deceitful policies and the support he receives from above (meaning Iran's Guardian Council and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei)."

The dominant US media repeated similar comments to the above ones, so their post-June 12 response was no surprise.

On June 13, Robert Worth and Nazila Fathi in The New York Times headlined: "Protests Flare in Tehran as Opposition Disputes Vote," then described "the most intense protests in a decade....with riot police officers using batons and tear gas against opposition demonstrators who claimed President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had stolen the presidential election."

The Wall Street Journal called the election "a sham" and cited the AP reporting that "election authorities were miraculously able to count millions of paper ballots (in just hours) after the polls closed to hand Mr. Ahmadinejad his supposed victory." It quoted writer Laura Secor in the New Yorker saying: "What is most shocking is not the fraud itself, but that it

was brazen and entirely without pretext.”

Perhaps she meant “precedent,” but either way she ignored two stolen US elections for George Bush and the shameful media response to them.

Also disturbing are more moderate, supposedly even-handed, and progressive US voices. On June 13, Stephen Zunes asked “Has the Election Been Stolen in Iran?” Again with no evidence he wrote:

“....predictions of knowledgeable Iranian observers from various countries and from across the political spectrum were nearly unanimous in the belief that the leading challenger Mir Hossein Mousavi would (win) decisively..” Given the results, “the only reasonable assumption was that there has been fraud on a massive scale.”

Juan Cole admitted “difficulties of catching history on the run (and said evidence) may emerge for Ahmadinejad’s upset that does not involve fraud,” yet he concluded on first reaction that “this post-election situation looks to me like a crime scene.”

The Nation magazine has had a shameful record since inception. In more recent years, it called the US-led NATO Serbia-Kosovo aggression “humanitarian intervention.” Initially it supported the Afghanistan war and the Iraq war in its run-up and early months. In 2000 and 2004, it ignored blatant electoral fraud for George Bush. It attacks Hugo Chavez, and was hostile to Jean-Bertrand Aristide during his years as Haiti’s President. It called the 2008 US presidential campaign the “Obama Moment” for his “historic candidacy” and keeps supporting him despite his brazen betrayal of voters who elected him.

Now it’s at it again in a June 13 Robert Dreyfuss article headlined, “Iran’s Ex-Foreign Minister Yazdi: It’s a Coup” in which (without no substantiating evidence) he called the election “rigged,” referred to Ahmadinejad as “radical-right,” and said “his paramilitary backers were kept in office.” Now “Iran’s capital (is) steeped in anger, despair, and bitterness” as he almost cheered for a “color revolution” with comments like:

“For years, the hardline clergy and their allies, including Ahmadinejad, have feared nothing more than an Iranian-style ‘color revolution.’ Now, Mousavi – with solid establishment credentials, an Islamic revolutionary pedigree second to none, and an outspoken pro-reform message – finds himself at the head of a green parade” in contrast to “Ahmadinejad’s Red Tide,” a reference to “the red-armband-wearing, virtual fascist movement in support of reelecting” him.

A lack of journalistic and analytical integrity on the left and right continues to hype fraud without a shred of supportive evidence, so something sinister may be visible on Iranian streets. If true, the Obama administration likely is behind it or at least in support, so Iranians need remember their history.

More on that below, but first some background. Four candidates participated, each of whom was vetted and approved by Iran’s Guardian Council and most importantly Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – a system similar to America where democracy is illusory because party bosses choose candidates, big money controls them, key outcomes are predetermined, horse race journalism and media hype substitute for honest coverage, independent voices are suppressed, vital issues go unaddressed, voter disenfranchisement

is rife, and corporate-run electronic voting machines decide winners, not the electorate.

In Iran, the Guardian Counsel's approved candidates seek closer relations with America and less confrontation. In deference to Iran's business and elitist interests, they favor austerity measures against Iranian workers. In March, Ahmadinejad's budget called for reduced spending by eliminating subsidies on water, fuel and electricity but kept "targeted" ones in place for the nation's poor.

On November 6, Ahmadinejad congratulated Obama on his election and wrote: "The great civilization-building and justice-seeking nation of Iran would welcome major, fair and real changes, in policies and actions, especially in this region." On February 10, he said he was willing to negotiate "in a fair atmosphere with mutual respect," short of surrendering Iranian sovereignty. Given 30 years of confrontation since 1979, it's doubtful that's enough, despite recent hints of rapprochement from Washington.

The four candidates included:

— current President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; in 2005, he scored a decisive second round victory over former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (61.69% - 35.93%), one of Iran's wealthiest men, notoriously corrupt, and despised by Iranian workers and the poor; since elected, Ahmadinejad has been mischaracterized, misquoted, and vilified in Washington, Tel Aviv, and the West for supporting Palestine's legitimate Hamas government, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Iran's right to peaceful commercial nuclear power development; he's supported by Iran's military, conservative elements, Iranian workers, and the nation's urban and rural poor;

— Mir Hossein Mousavi served earlier (from 1981 - 1989) as Iran's Prime Minister (before constitutional changes ended the position) and is currently president of the Iranian Academy of Arts and a member of the Expediency Discernment Council and High Council of Cultural Revolution; earlier he served as Foreign Minister; as Prime Minister, he was hardline and anti-Western during the Iran - Iraq war when he imposed austerity measures to finance it; today, he draws support from portions of Iran's ruling elite and urban middle class, especially students and youths who favor better relations with America;

— Mohsen Rezaei is a politician, economist, and former Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) commander; he's currently Secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council and drew sparse support in the June 12 election; and

— Mehdi Karroubi is a cleric and former parliamentary speaker; he's currently chairman of the National Trust party and founding member and former chairman of the Association of Combatant Clerics party; he also scored poorly in election results that came down to a contest between the two leading candidates.

On June 13, Iran's Interior Minister, Sadeq Mahsouli, announced the following results after which street protests erupted:

— turnout was 85% of eligible voters

— Ahmadinejad won with 62.63%

— Mousavi was second with 33.75%

- Rezaei got 1.73%
- Karroubi had 0.85%, and
- 1.04% of ballots were voided.

Pre-election polls suggest that Ahmadinejad Really Won

One or more independent pre-election polls conducted several weeks before June 12 provide evidence of Ahmadinejad's strong victory, and it shouldn't surprise. It was comparable to his sweeping 2005 runoff win in which he trounced former President Rafsanjani as explained above. This time, no second round was needed because only two dominant candidates contested. The others needn't have bothered as final results showed.

Although Iran is a theocracy with standards leaving a lot to be desired, it's one of the few Middle East countries holding real elections, unlike regional monarchies or dictatorial states like Egypt where Hosni Mubarak has ruled for nearly 30 years and wins easily with well over 90% of the "vote" in little more than a sham process.

Pre-Election Independent Poll Results

Ken Ballen is president of Terror Free Tomorrow: the Center for Public Opinion, a nonprofit institute that researches attitudes toward extremism. Patrick Doherty is deputy director of the American Strategy Program at the New America Foundation Washington-based think tank chaired by Google CEO Eric Schmidt.

On June 15 in the Washington Post, they reported the results of their May 11 - 20 poll based on 1001 nationwide Iranian voter interviews (in all 30 provinces) with a 3.1% margin of error.

While Western media reported a surge for Mousavi, the results showed Ahmadinejad way ahead. "The breadth of Ahmadinejad's support was apparent in our preelection survey. During the campaign, for instance, Mousavi emphasized his identity as an Azeri, (Iran's second largest ethnic group after Persians), to woo Azeri voters." Yet poll results showed they favored Ahmadinejad 2 - 1.

Also, 18 - 24 year-olds strongly supported Ahmadinejad while Mousavi scored well only among university students and graduates and Iran's "highest-income" earners. The writers concluded "the possibility that the vote (was) not the product of widespread fraud" but reflected the electorate's true choice. They also said:

"Before other countries, including the United States, jump to the conclusion that the Iranian presidential elections were fraudulent, with the grave consequences such charges could bring, they should consider all independent information. The fact may simply be that the reelection of President Ahmadinejad is what the Iranian people wanted."

Perhaps so according to University of Michigan Professor Walter Mebane. He used statistical and computational "election forensics" to detect fraud in comparing 366 Iranian district results with those in the 2005 election and concluded that "substantial core" local results were in line with basic statistical trends. "In 2009, Mr. Ahmadinejad tended to do best in

towns where his (2005) support was highest, and he tended to do worst (where) turnout surged the most." He didn't rule out the possibility of manipulation but found no evidence to prove it.

Nonetheless, Washington may be capitalizing on a pretext to stir trouble with large protests continuing for days. Obama hinted it in a June 12 statement several hours before polls closed by saying: "...just as has been true in Lebanon, what can be true in Iran as well is that you're seeing people looking for new possibilities" - perhaps aided by covert CIA mischief, comparable to earlier decades of subversion, beginning in Iran in 1953.

America's Post-WW II Meddling in Iran

Before becoming Prime Minister in 1951, Mohammed Mossadegh served in parliament beginning in 1944 and also worked with other members of the National Front of Iran (Jebhe Melli) to establish democracy, free of foreign influence, especially with regard to oil.

In December 1944, he introduced a bill to bar foreign country oil negotiations, yet Britain retained control through its Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) at a time Iran's southern region had the world's largest known reserves. In late 1947, the government demanded a greater revenue share but Britain refused. In 1951, one month before Mossadegh became Prime Minister, Iran's parliament nationalized the AIOC and paid fair compensation for it.

Economic sanctions and an oil embargo followed. Iranian assets were also frozen in British banks. Major Anglo-America oil interests supported London, while a CIA coup aimed to oust Mossadegh. Conceived by Theodore Roosevelt's grandson Kermit, it took two attempts to succeed, and began each time by filling the streets with protesters against a leader The New York Times called "the most popular politician in the country." Nonetheless, a military showdown followed against pro-Mossadegh officers with each side staking their careers on choosing the winning one.

Mossadegh was ousted. Reza Shah Pahlavi returned to power. Sanctions were lifted, and America and Britain regained their client state until February 1979 when the same Anglo-American interests turned on the Shah and deposed him.

F. William Engdahl explained it in his important book, "A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order." In 1978, a White House Iran task force recommended ousting the Shah and replacing him with Ayatollah Khomeini, then living in France. It was part of a larger scheme to balkanize the Middle East along tribal and religious lines and create an "Arc of Crisis" from Central Asia to the Soviet Union.

Doing it in 1978 became urgent at a time the Shah was negotiating a 25-year oil agreement with British Petroleum (BP), but talks broke down in October. BP demanded exclusive rights to future output but refused to guarantee oil purchases. The Shah balked and looked for new buyers in continental Europe and elsewhere.

He also sought to create a modern energy infrastructure built around nuclear power generation to transform the region's power needs. He envisioned 20 new reactors by 1995, wanted to diversify Iran's dependence on oil to weaken Washington's pressure to recycle petrodollars, and also increase investments in leading continental European companies.

Washington was alarmed, tried to block the plan but failed, and resorted instead to destabilization, starting with cutting Iranian purchases. Economic pressures and oil strikes

followed along with US and UK agitators fanning religious discontent and other turmoil. The Carter administration urged Iran's Savak secret police to crack down as a way to arouse anti-Shah sentiment. Western media highlighted it, gave Khomeini a public stage to speak and prevented the Shah from responding.

In January 1979, things came to a head. The Shah fled the country, Khomeini returned, and proclaimed a theocratic state. By May, he cancelled Iran's nuclear plans. America thought it could control him and his nation's oil but calculated wrongly. Tensions built, thirty years later they continue, and post-June 12 they may again be coming to a boil.

Iranian Street Protests and Their Ominous Possibilities

Leading up to and after the Iranian election, The New York Times played its customary role as lead media gatekeeper/instigator doing what it does best - sanitizing news, filtering out uncomfortable truths, and presenting distorted opinions for the powerful interests it represents.

Roger Cohen's June 17 op-ed said 40 million Iranian "votes (were) flouted," many of whom "have crossed over from reluctant acquiescence to the Islamic Republic into opposition. (The Republic) has lost legitimacy. It is fissured. It will not be the same again." Does he know something we don't?

He called Mousavi "the reformist of impeccable revolutionary credentials." He's "a credible vehicle for a reform regime that serves to preserve it - an acceptable compromise to most Iranians." No matter that most of them apparently preferred Ahmadinejad, an outcome neither Cohen nor the Times accepts, or perhaps they and Washington do to be able to use his victory to incite trouble.

On June 17, The Times' feature story highlighted "Iranians angry at the results of last week's election (marshaled) tens of thousands (in) the streets (in spite of) signs of an intensified crackdown....the government expanded (it) with more arrests and pressure against journalists to limit coverage of the protests."

Scant mention was made of huge pro-Ahmadinejad crowds in central Tehran nor has there been in other media reports, especially on television where, not surprisingly, coverage has been distorted, one-way, and hostile to the Iranian president and regime, much as it's always been.

What's going on? Are anti-Ahmadinejad protests spontaneous or are covert instigators inciting them?

The Pak Alert Press reported that former Pakistani Army General Mirza Aslam Beig claims that the CIA distributed around \$400 million inside Iran to incite revolution. In a June 15 interview with Pashto Radio, he cited "undisputed" intelligence proving interference.

"The documents prove that the CIA spend \$400 million inside Iran to prop up a colorful-hollow revolution following the election" to incite regime change for a pro-Western government. He called Ahmadinejad's victory "a decisive point in regional policy and if Pakistan and Afghanistan unite with Iran, the US has to leave the area, especially (from) occupied Afghanistan."

Writing in the New Yorker's June 29, 2008 issue, Seymour Hersh said "Late last year, Congress agreed to a request from President Bush to fund a major escalation of covert operations against Iran, according to current and former military, intelligence, and congressional sources. These operations, for which the President sought up to four hundred million dollars, were described in a Presidential Finding signed by Bush, and are designed to destabilize the country's religious leadership."

Involved is support for Iranian dissidents and "gathering intelligence about Iran's suspected nuclear-weapons program." Perhaps later to disrupt the presidential election with Hersh saying Bush's Finding "focussed on undermining Iran's nuclear ambitions and trying to undermine the government through regime change (by)working with opposition groups and passing money," according to a person familiar with its contents. His account is a year old but may be relevant to today, hopefully something he'll substantiate in a future report given what's now playing out.

On June 16, Computerworld's Robert McMillan reported more of it in writing about key Iranian web sites knocked offline. "On (June 15), sites belonging to Iranian news agencies, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Iran's supreme leader (Khamenei) were knocked offline after activists opposed to the Iranian government posted tools designed to barrage these websites with traffic."

"This type of attack, known as a denial of service (DoS) attack, has become a standard political protest tool, and has been used by grassroots protesters" in previous cyber-incidents, including Georgia in 2008. Initial efforts were to recruit Iranian protesters, but international users are now being targeted.

Dancho Danchev is a security consultant. He counted 12 Iranian sites under attack, including news agencies, the Foreign Affairs Ministry, National Police, and Ministries of Interior and Justice. Iranian officials have responded in kind to prevent protesters from social networking. Iran's General Internet service was also disrupted for a short time. It's again operating but anything may happen going forward. Computer World said Twitter "emerged as the major source of information on the protests, and is being" picked up in major media coverage.

Of interest is a June 18 Yaroslav Trofimov Wall Street Journal online article headlined "Some Israelis Prize Ahmadinejad's Role." He explained that some high level Israelis prefer him in power. One is Mossad chief, Meir Dagan, telling a closed Knesset committee hearing that his controversial reputation "makes it easier for Israel to enlist international support against Iran's nuclear program." Mousavi winning, however, would have created "a graver problem."

Israeli officials said that in the 1980s, Mousavi "jump-started Iran's nuclear drive" as prime minister. Both he and Ahmadinejad "pose the same threat. But it's better for Israel that you have a leader with a very dangerous ideology who speaks clearly so that nobody can ignore him," according to Knesset deputy speaker Danny Danon. A more soft-spoken president promising improved relations "would have made it harder for us to recruit the world to our side," he added, and the same argument holds for America.

Addressing the issue of a stolen election, Dagan dismissed it out of hand in saying alleged ballot-stuffing in Iran is no worse than common electoral fraud in all democracies. In his judgment, protests will fizzle in several days.

Ardesir Ommni, co-founder and president of the American Iranian Friendship Committee (AIFC), headlined his June 16 Mathaba.net article "Iran: Another Face of Velvet Revolution" in suggesting that Ahmadinejad's opposition "is doing its utmost to create unrest and prepare the ground for a velvet takeover" much like others in Georgia and Ukraine as well as twice before in Iran.

It's not "realizable in Iran," he said, "because the workers and farmers, the millions who gave the lives of their children for the cause of independence and sovereignty, defend the Revolution and their real President who has frustrated the schemes and plots of the warmongers. (They're proud that) Ahmadinejad has defied and resisted the war threats and sanctions by the same powers that have ruined the lives of" millions throughout the world and want no part of it themselves.

On June 15, Marxist.com editor Alan Woods expressed another view in headlining "Iran: the Revolution has begun." He cited "dramatic events" with hundreds of thousands in Tehran and other city streets disputing the election results. Some marched silently. Others were vocal, angry and confronted by riot police crackdowns.

"The protests have marked the most serious display of discontent in the Islamic Republic in years. The breath of the mass movement is unprecedented (expressing) the accumulated rage and frustration that has been accumulating for the past 30 years....Power is slipping from the trembling hands of the leaders and passing to the streets....Nobody can say where events will end. But one thing is certain: Iran will never be the same again....the Iranian Revolution has begun!"

Woods sees it growing and suggests it's progressing "through a whole series of stages before it has finally run its course. But in the end we are sure that it will triumph. When that moment comes, it will have explosive repercussions throughout the Middle East, Asia, and the whole world."

Who can say if he, Ommni, or others are right or if Washington is plotting regime change, much like before in Iran and throughout the world. Thus far, events are fast moving with no clear outcome in sight. It remains to be seen whether Iranians or imperial America will prevail, then what happens next in this volatile part of the world.

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