

Iran's First Post-Shah President Says Iran's Theocracy Is 'Despotic'

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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- Bani-Sadr says Iran was trying for a nuclear bomb until 2003
- He says “mismanagement and corruption” plague the country
- He calls current government “despotic”
- He says winners in nuclear deal are “Israel, Saudi Arabia and their Arab allies”

Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, the Sorbonne-educated economist who was the first post-Shah President of Iran — from 4 February 1980 until he was impeached by parliament on 21 June 1981 for his performance as Commander-in-Chief during the Iran-Iraq War — was [interviewed July 15th by Nathan Gardels of Huffington Post](#), and referred to Iran's theocracy as “despotic.” He said that the deal the Obama Administration has worked out with Iran “is a capitulation to outside powers by the regime of the ayatollahs that has brought this fate upon the Iranian people.”

He says that,

“Although the Iranian people's unbearable economic situation and the rapidly deteriorating environment are results of the regime's destruction of the economy through mismanagement and corruption, people have believed that the situation is a result of the sanctions. Yet because they also know that [Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei and his people who are signing the Vienna submission are also responsible for the status quo, the positions of both [Iranian President] Rouhani and the reformists will be strengthened.”

Bani-Sadr, who lives under police protection in exile in France (much as his sponsor Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had in 1978-79 during the last year while the Shah was still in power in Iran), seems to be calling for a democratic revolution in Iran, when he says: “If people remain inactive, Khamenei will use the opportunity to eliminate those he calls the ‘leaders of sedition’: Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karubi and their colleagues. If people become active, however, the balance of power will shift and become detrimental to the ‘principlists,’ those who are obedient to Khamenei.”

Bani-Sadr claims that the big foreign winners in this nuclear deal are “Israel, Saudi Arabia and their Arab allies” — that is to say, Iran's enemies. However, the ayatollahs have

accepted this deal in order to forestall a revolution from below — a revolution against their corruption, and “their despotic regimes.”

Bani-Sadr explains how this nuclear deal came to pass:

“When the Iranian regime began its secret nuclear activities around 25 years ago, the goal was to make an atomic bomb. Yet from 2003 onward, this goal was replaced with the aim of creating nuclear fuel. Today, we see that while neither of these goals have been achieved, they have been used by the 5+1 to place Iran under their control. And, as a condition of the conventional arms embargo is military control, Iran can do nothing as its neighbors continue to take oil and gas from the Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea and shared fields. So far this has cost the country hundreds of billions of dollars. If the regime had been honest about all its nuclear activities rather than keeping a façade of nuclear enrichment and shut down its entire program, the country could have had a normal status and the national rights of Iranians could have been recognized. Instead, Iranians are paying the price.”

So: the theocratic despots have been pushed back domestically by a dissatisfied public, but they still cling to power. Internationally, Bani-Sadr expects “the alliances of Israel and Saudi Arabia” to be “dominating the region.”

However, both Israel and Saudi Arabia had been trying to get America to invade Iran, not negotiate with it; and Republicans support the Israeli/Saudi position strongly. [A CBS News Poll taken 21-24 March 2015 and published on March 25th](#) showed that whereas only 29% of the American public said that “Iran’s nuclear program” is a “threat requiring military action now,” 45% of Republicans did; only 20% of Democrats did, and 28% of Independents did. However, 41% of Republicans thought that Iran’s nuclear program is a “threat” that “can be contained” without invading. So: even on the Republican side, there will be primary voters who might be open to supporting the deal that Secretary of State John Kerry has worked out with Iran. Nonetheless, John McCain famously won the 2008 Republican primaries by saying, [“Bomb, bomb, bomb, Iran.”](#) Bombing what had been Iran’s chief enemy Iraq in 2003 hasn’t slaked their bloodlust.

Perhaps one reason (besides the French police protection) why Bani-Sadr can safely state publicly that the ayatollahs are “despots” — and that until 2003 they were determined to build nuclear weapons — is that [“his father was an ayatollah and close to Ruhollah Khomeini,”](#) the first of Iran’s Supreme Leaders. The ayatollahs were able to get him impeached, but are not able to stop him in France from talking to the international press. Assassinating Bani-Sadr would be likelier to spark a new revolution in Iran than to prevent one.

Investigative historian Eric Zuesse is the author, most recently, of [They’re Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010](#), and of [CHRIST’S VENTRILOQUISTS: The Event that Created Christianity](#).

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