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USADI Commentary

Iran's Hollow "Reformers" and Their Hollow Threat of Resignation

The utterly ineffective "reformist" camp of Khatami has time after time threatened the rival faction with resignation and each time they have withdrawn their threats. It seems, unlike some in Washington, the Iranian people can easily see through these "knights of reform," riding wooden horses, waving wooden swords, and following their *Don Quixote*, Khatami.

Associated Press, January 13: The official Islamic Republic News Agency quoted Vice President Mohammad Sattarifar as saying, "If the government feels that it can't fulfill its responsibilities... then it does not believe that there is any reason to stay in power."

Agence France Presse, January 14: Khatami stood by a dramatic threat to lead a mass resignation... "We have to remain firm. If one day we are asked to leave, then we will all leave, together," the president warned.

Reuters, January 15: Iranian government officials are likely to drop their threats to resign... A second government source said that President Khatami would in any case not accept their resignations... Even close allies of Khatami now criticize him for failing to stand up to hard-liners.

Associated Press, January 16: Lawmakers staging a sit-in protest in parliament vowed Friday to begin a fast. "We are prepared to pay all costs of defending free elections," he [Khatami's brother] said.

Reuters, January 21: A photographer whose picture of Iranian Parliament members tucking into a generous spread of lamb, dates and pickles during a break in a "political fast" said on Wednesday he had been banned from parliament. The *Sharq* newspaper splashed the photograph of members at a food-laden table across its front page this week under the headline: "Protesters' political fast begins."

Reuters, January 17: Iran's Interior Ministry said on Saturday it would hold the vote only if satisfied that candidates had not been unfairly barred. But the ministry stressed that if it withdrew, the elections would not be postponed as "senior officials" would appoint another body to oversee the voting.

Reuters, January 19: Unfulfilled threats to resign or boycott elections have become so commonplace from reformists in recent years that most Iranians no longer take them seriously. In an interview... published on Monday, 2003 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi said Khatami should now make good on his previous threats to quit. "President Khatami said himself that if he couldn't pass measures because of the Guardian Council he would resign," Ebadi said. "But still he has not. I think he should fulfill his promise."

Reuters, January 21: Khatami Wednesday ruled out resigning over a ban on candidates standing in parliamentary elections. "I have the intention to continue my task and my service to the people," Khatami said in an interview.

Meanwhile in Iraq...

US Troops Say Iranians Left Bomb At House In Iraq

BAGHDAD - U.S. soldiers found a homemade bomb that they believe was left inside an unfinished house by a group of Iranians in Samarra, 100 kilometers north of Baghdad.

An Iraqi living in the area told soldiers that he saw two cars each carrying five Farsi-speaking men pull up at the building late Sunday and leave shortly after. Soldiers searched the building and found a device packed with plastic explosives, the U.S. military said Monday.

Associated Press, Jan. 19, 2004

... And on Nuclear Front

Iran Reneges on Nuclear Promise

VIENNA - Western diplomats and nuclear experts voiced growing concern Tuesday that Iran has reneged on its promise to fully suspend uranium enrichment -- a process that can be used to make nuclear weapons.

Diplomats told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, even key European nations who negotiated the deal with Tehran have started to question Iran's commitment because it appears to be using semantics -- the meaning of the word suspend -- to keep some of its nuclear enrichment program operational.

The United States interprets suspension as encompassing the whole process -- including a halt in assemblage of enrichment equipment... One of the diplomats suggested an oversight on the part of France, Germany and Britain when they made their deal with Iran.

"Right from the beginning, everybody asked, 'what is suspension,' but the Europeans and Iranians never defined it," he said.

Associated Press, Jan. 20, 2004

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.

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Boston Globe (Editorial)
January 17, 2004
Arising in Iran

It is becoming harder than ever to ignore the contradictions at the core of Iran's Islamic Republic. The sham quality of the system's democratic facade was on display Wednesday...

The theocratic rule of the mullahs in Iran is doomed. Two-thirds of Iran's population today is under 30 years old. By overwhelming majorities they have now voted several times for regime change. They want a truly free press, freedom of speech and association, women's rights, and jobs for a rapidly expanding work force -- jobs that will come only in an economy that has been liberated from the mobster-like hold of corrupt clerics running unregulated conglomerates called religious foundations.

The longer the misrule of the mullahs goes on, the more Iran's youth are alienated from both the hard-line clerics and those figures such as the ineffectual President Mohammad Khatami who want to preserve the current system by making it only marginally less repressive.

Young Iranians are being inoculated against the lures of autocracy and extremism. The lesson has been painful, but they are learning to demand true democratic self-government. They have become partisans of civil and human rights and of Iran's opening up to a diverse world...

Guardian (UK)
January 19, 2004
Cautious leader fails to live up to great expectations

He once attracted the kind of adoration celebrities enjoy in the west, but those days are long gone. The electoral crisis gripping Iran shows why President Mohammad Khatami no longer enjoys such reverence, and why so many former supporters are disillusioned with his cautious approach.

The smiling cleric who set out to reform Iran's rigid theocracy has proved unable to fulfill the high expectations that met his victory six years ago. Last week, while condemning the Guardian Council's ruling to ban more than 3,000 moderates from standing in next month's elections, Mr. Khatami pleaded with MPs to call off their sit-in at parliament. The whole issue, he said, could be solved through talks with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. It was a typical Khatami moment, full of restraint, humility and eloquence. But it was infuriating for those who believe democracy will never be won without rallying popular anger on the street.

Mr. Khatami has accepted that the pace of reform has been slow, but with students, journalists and dissidents languishing in jail and parliamentary initiatives vetoed, Mr. Khatami seemed ready to throw down the gauntlet in 2002. He proposed two bills to stop arbitrary vetting of electoral candidates and end political trials. Without the bills, Mr Khatami said he could not carry out his role as president. The bills were adopted by parliament but vetoed by the council. Mr. Khatami chose not to follow through on his implied threat to step down and the bills remain dead.

With a year left in his second and final term, Mr. Khatami's political star seems to be fading. More radical ideas and tactics, including civil disobedience, may eventually overtake his go-slow policy.

The Washington Times
January 20, 2004
Of mullahs and warlords

... The Iraqi Shia street, who saw the failure of both the mullah-led regime next door in Iran and of Arab nationalism, seek a moderate, secular state in which they will take majority position. But they are not represented. Under Ba'athist rule, political organizing inside the country was a surefire ticket to Saddam's prisons. Parties therefore developed clandestinely. Today's Shia leadership of mullahs and politicians spent years under the sponsorship of Iran and have another agenda than the street. They want an Iranian-style theocracy. ...

Whether Shia or Sunni, Arab or Kurd, the liberal and democratic majority in the country have not yet found a voice for themselves. Moreover, the United States has not deemed to consult with the people of the country...

With the current setup, an election might prove disastrous for the United States and for those Iraqis who want to see a liberal, democratic, pluralistic and federal Iraq. Mullahs and warlords with ties to neighbors who do not want to see a successful Iraq will tell — and are telling — the people that the United States is the cause of their continuing misery. They will also be the ones who will take the winning seat in any forthcoming elections. ...

By Hiwa Osman, an editor and journalism trainer with the Institute for War & Peace Reporting in Baghdad.