

USADI Dispatch

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USADI Commentary

The Message of Election Boycott: Engage the Iranian People not the Ruling Theocracy

From all indications, the Iranian people will overwhelmingly boycott Friday's sham Parliamentary election in Iran. For weeks, the walls, billboards and lamp posts in Tehran and Iran's major cities have been covered with slogans such as: "No to Sham Election" and "Referendum on regime change, this is people's demand."

A state-sponsored opinion poll taken between November 19th and January 21st showed that only 10.5 percent of the eligible voters planned to vote. A more recent poll predicted that the turnout will be less than five percent.

Obviously, the clerical regime will mobilize all its resources for a show of big turnout and then announce grossly inflated figures. Election fraud has been a permanent feature of every Iranian election but this one should take the cake. The mullahs, as never before, are in the dire need of a pretense to popular legitimacy since the policy of "engagement" with Iran's mullahs is now hanging by a thread.

The regime has taken a number of steps to inflate the turnout figure, including the printing of millions of blank birth certificates and duplicates IDs so that loyal supporters can vote several times. Officials have ordered the security and military personnel to vote more than once, using different IDs card each time. They have also made voting by government employees, teachers and students mandatory.

The Revolutionary Guards Corps has ordered thousands of its personnel to parade into a select few polling stations in Tehran where foreign journalists would be taken. The authorities have also offered free food coupons and free tickets to travel vouchers to would-be voters at sites adjacent to polling stations.

This week, our Senate unanimously adopted a Senate Resolution sponsored by Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) that decisively supports the Iranian people's democratic aspirations: "The policy of the United States should be to advocate a genuine democratic government in Iran that will restore freedom to the people of Iran, will abandon terrorism, will protect human rights, and will live in peace and security with the international community."

Commenting on Friday's elections, Senator Brownback stated, "The Iranian people have rejected hollow promises of reform. Their message to us is that Iran's ruling theocracy can not be reformed from within and that instead of engaging Iran's so-called moderates or any other faction, we must engage the Iranian people and their democratic opposition by fully supporting the call for an internationally monitored referendum for democratic change to determine the fate of the fundamentalist regime in Iran. There is hope for internal change by relying on the organized opposition, where there was none in Iraq or Afghanistan."

Now, there is a golden opportunity to sincerely engage the Iranian people and reject an illegitimate theocracy that threatens the security of the United States and the rest of the world. Washington as well as EU capitals must seize this moment and follow the courageous initiative by Senator Brownback and his fellow senators.

Young Iranians will not vote

TEHRAN - ... "I voted twice for the reformists," Leila, 21, says. And will she be voting this time?

She replies: "There's not much point voting for the reformists anymore. I'm not going to vote. It won't change anything at all," she says..

Ali, 19 and unemployed, says he will not be voting either, another example of what appears to be a broad assumption that whoever wins control over the Majlis, nothing will change.

"Politicians are all in it for themselves, so how can they expect us to vote for them?"

AFP, Feb 16, 2004

"Khatami was Just Hot Air"

ISFAHAN - ... "Reformist or conservative - it is all the same. Those who prop up the pillars of the current regime will win the seats," the 40-year old Hamid said.

"... Khatami was just hot air. What has he done for anyone?" he said, dismissing the smiling cleric...

"There is no way I could vote," said Khosro, 54. "These are not elections, they are appointments."

Reuters, February 18, 2004

Khatami was part of the System

"Khatami had nice words but no actions," said Reza, 24. "He's part of the system, he doesn't really believe in change... Nothing will change... until this system collapses."

"Our leaders can't be trusted. Everything here is ruined yet they tell us we're the envy of the world," said Hossein, 27

Reuters, February 18, 2004

History of False Promises

TEHRAN - ... Saber says elected officials in Iran have a history of making false promises about reform and economic development. He says too many members of parliament only look out for their own interests, not those of constituents.

"They enter parliament on a bicycle," he says, "and they leave driving Mercedes Benzes." (*SF Chronicle, Feb. 10, 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.

1201 Pennsylvania Ave, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20004

Tel: 202-661-4675, Fax: 202-318-0402, E-mail: dispatch@usadيران.org

Agence France Presse
February 15, 2004
Iranian Women to Shun Parliamentary Election

TEHRAN - Iranian women appear determined to stay away from the country's parliamentary elections this Friday, amid frustration with the failure of the reform movement they played a key role in launching.

Many Iranian woman interviewed here feel helpless to reverse what they consider a disastrous social and economic situation in the Islamic republic, and fret that things can only get worse. Others say that conditions may have to deteriorate until there is an explosive backlash before progress can be made in the country. One 22-year-old student, who refused to be named, said... "I hope that things will get worse and worse until they explode."

Olduz said she had once gone to the ballot box to vote for Muhammad Khatami but he ended up disappointing her. "There is no real hero around," she shrugged. But the outlook for women has become progressively bleaker (during Khatami's presidency). An 18-year-old psychology student, who wore the classic chador black robe and spoke on condition of anonymity, also said she does not plan to vote Friday.

"The situation is not going to change in Iran whether it is the conservatives or reformists who win," she said. She put little stock in the fact that the conservatives were also fielding women candidates in the election. "Sixty to 70 percent of the members of parliament were reformists and they could not do anything. Each time they got to the point of changing something, the Guardians Council imposed a veto," she said, referring to the political watchdog also behind the mass barring of candidates. "So what can one or two candidates do, whether they be men or women?"

Several older women refused to speak about the political situation. But Roya, 46, a retired schoolteacher, also planned to sit out the vote. "I am not satisfied either with the candidates, nor the current members of parliament nor the government nor the regime," she said. The main problems facing the country were economic, social and administrative, she said, adding that she was eligible for her pension but was told that the administration had no money left for it. "Things can't be worse," Roya said.

One wife was making a statement not only for herself, but for her husband, the 30-year-old man said. She has no plans to vote Friday and has hidden his voting card so he can't turn out either.

National Review Online
February 18, 2004
Stalinist Mullahs: The Iranian regime is in open battle with its own people

Iran is now racing, literally hell-bent toward two dramatic confrontations: one within the country, between forces of tyranny and forces of democracy and/or reform. The other rages outside the country, a desperate war against the United States, its Coalition allies, and the Iraqis who support us. Both derive from the fundamental weakness of the fundamentalist regime, which has lost the support of the overwhelming majority of the Iranian people, and is increasingly defining itself a pariah state because of its support for terror and its brazen pursuit of atomic weapons...

Much more attention has been given to the "hard-liners vs. reformers" kabuki dance leading up to Friday's parliamentary elections. The ritual dance itself—the hard-liners first removed thousands of reformers from the electoral lists, then, following protests, restored a few hundred — is not as important as most reporters and columnists would have us believe, since the makeup of the parliament has nothing to do with the real exercise of power in Iran. But the lessons from the dance are enormously important. Above all, the dance has shown both the political impotence and the moral fecklessness of President Khatami, because he first failed to get his people on the ballot, and then, once the Supreme Leader and the various theocratic institutions had slapped him down, he supinely obeyed and then had the cheek to call upon the people to turn out and vote, in support of "Iranian democracy." Maybe he'd been listening too much to Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, the other great philosopher of "Iranian democracy."...

Meanwhile, the regime is placing terrorists in parliament. Loyal members of the security forces are now candidates in the upcoming elections from Teheran and other metropolitan center. For example, 30 candidates running under the banner of Abadegarane Irane Eslami (The Builders of an Islamic Iran) are members of the security forces and are being managed by the father-in-law of Khamenei's daughter Mr. Hadad Adel...

The chief of staff of the armed forces has cancelled all leaves for all military personnel starting Tuesday for one week. All soldiers have been commanded to cast their ballots in the elections on Friday, as have all members of the revolutionary guards and all air force personnel.

In other words, the regime is now removing the "reformist" mask from all Iranian institutions. Henceforth we will see Stalinist Shiites alone...

Excerpts from an article by Michael Ledeen, Resident Scholar in the Freedom Chair at the American Enterprise Institute