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USADI Commentary

From Tehran, Boukan, and Bam to Vienna: Democracy, not Theocracy, is the Solution for Iran

The international media has focused on the meeting of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, which is tackling Iran's nuclear weapons program.

There is no lack of twist and turns there. Despite their mastery of the art of deception, Tehran's secret nuclear weapons program is so grand that the mullahs have been having a tough time covering it up. Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi even threatened that Iran would resume its uranium enrichment program and stop cooperating with the IAEA. Regrettably, Tehran will apparently not be reported to the Security Council.

Simultaneously, a much less reported but no less significant series of events have been taking place in Iran. On Monday March 8, the International Woman's Day, more than 500 people held a rally in defense of women's rights in Tehran's Laleh Park. The Bassiji thugs along with official security personnel attacked the gathering, beating and arresting dozens of the participants.

More significantly, a major strike by Iran's teachers entered its sixth day today and is fast spreading to every major city and town. Although the strike began with demands for salary hikes and employment benefits, some analyst see it as having the potential to quickly escalate into a major political showdown with the clerical regime.

At the same time according to state-run media and wire reports, anti-government demonstrations have erupted in several cities in Iranian Kurdistan such as Boukan, Marivan, and Sanandaj, the provincial capital. Agence France Presse reported the arrest of more 100 people and injury to many others. Residents protested to "show their solidarity with the Iraqi Kurds, who have gained the right of autonomy after years of repression," AFP reported.

Also amid revelations on the loss of \$10 million quake aid from coffers of Iran's Red Crescent Society, rioting erupted in the city of Bam last week. The earthquake survivors protested the lack of promised foreign aid and inadequate shelter from soaring desert temperatures. Several cars, tents and trailers serving as banks were set afire. Chanting "He's a liar," the throngs denounced the provincial governor for not passing on relief supplies that residents believe poured into Iran after the Dec. 26 quake. The governor resigned few days later.

These acts of protest in different parts of Iran share a common thread with the discussions in Vienna: As long as Iran is ruled by a theocratic regime, no economic prosperity, no human rights, no rights for ethnic and religious minorities, and no relief from Iran's nuclear and terrorist threats are conceivable. Only a change of regime would provide be a realistic solution.

The United States must adopt a coherent policy to support the democracy movement in Iran and embrace democratic opposition forces who are working to oust the ruling mullahs.

Iran Teacher Strike

TEHRAN -- Iranian teachers striking over pay have forced scores of schools nationwide to shut down in the Islamic Republic's biggest industrial dispute for at least two years, teachers and parliamentarians said on Tuesday.

Though frustration over low pay and poor living conditions are widespread in Iran, nationwide strikes are rare in the oil-rich country where hard-line judges tolerate little dissent. Teachers said the strike had caught on by word of mouth.

While teachers said the strike was not politically motivated, some analysts said it could spark a wider crisis.

"It might lead to a political crisis because teachers' influence extends from the working class to the intellectual elite," said Hossein Mirzamani, a political science lecturer at Tehran University.

Reuters, March 9, 2004

Iranians stage women's day rally

TEHRAN - A group of several hundred Iranian female activists staged a rally here Monday to mark International Women's Day, despite warnings from authorities that the gathering was illegal.

As they assembled in central Tehran's Laleh park, the noisy group of about 500 women shouted slogans condemning violence against women as well as laws they see as discriminatory.

An AFP reporter said a few women were seen being detained by police after they tried to lead the group into the streets.

AFP, March 8, 2004

Two more hanged in Iran

TEHRAN -- Two Iranians have been executed by hanging in the western Kurdish town of Baneh, press reports said.

After a speedy trial, Saadollah Rahimi and Dalir Mohammadi were found guilty.

The reports said the pair were executed on Monday -- eight days after the crime -- but did not say if they were hanged in public or in prison.

AFP, March 9, 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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The Telegraph (UK)

Mar 8, 2004

Stand Up to the Mullahs

The latest installment of the long-running transatlantic tussle over Western policy towards Iran will be played out today in Vienna at the quarterly meeting of the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The Americans, as ever, want a tougher resolution off the back of the director-general's latest report, focusing upon the failures of the Islamic republic to come fully clean about its nuclear program; the European governments, led by France and Germany, but with Britain not far behind, are more willing to accept that measurable, albeit imperfect, progress has been made. Everyone says they want a "tough resolution". The differences lie over what exactly "tough" means. The result is a dangerous lack of clarity that the mullahs are bound to exploit.

The Government's treatment of Iran resembles the way it handled the IRA during the "peace process": no matter what atrocities are committed, it always gives the Islamists "one last chance". And, as with the leadership of the republican movement, there has been an enormous investment in the Iranian moderates at the expense of almost every other consideration. Even though the policy of "constructive engagement" has been a failure... the Foreign Office has been woefully slow in constructing alternative approaches based upon support for genuine democracy. Indeed, George W Bush implicitly recognized as much when he slapped down the political director of the Foreign Office, John Sawers, at a recent meeting at the White House...

The failure of policy is worse than just a rigid desire to hold on to the moderate nurse for fear of finding something worse. It is also based upon a fundamentally faulty analysis - that the current Iranian regime is a "big beast" in the regional jungle which will be around for some time to come and which must be handled with great care. This is manifested by the toleration in the British occupation zone in Iraq of the semi-overt presence of Iranian intelligence officers and such pro-Iranian terrorist groups as Hizbollah. British officials are so desperate to keep things sweet that they dramatically downplay Teheran's hand in the Iraqi insurgency - even though senior Jordanians (as well as Americans) are now very explicit about the violence wrought by the Iranians.

This "hear no evil" approach has served the West ill. After all, every time the Americans have sought to make overtures to revolutionary Iran - in 1979 after the fall of the Shah, in 1985-86 at the time of the Iran-Contra affair, and in 1996-97, when the Clinton Administration apologised for America's historic support of the Pahlavi dynasty - the Islamic Republic has read it as a sign of weakness. Why should we in Britain suppose that the clerics take us any more seriously than they do the "Great Satan"?

Wall Street Journal Europe

March 11, 2004

Caving In to the Mullahs

With new evidence of Iran's nuclear deceptions emerging almost daily, it is troubling that Europe seemed to have coaxed the U.S. into yet another wrist-slapping exercise. At the board meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna Tuesday, Washington gave in to European demands and agreed in a draft resolution to tone down criticism of Iran's clandestine nuclear program and even praise Teheran's "cooperation" with the IAEA.

Yet there is no longer any doubt that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons. Hassan Rohani, of the Supreme Council for National Security, practically admitted as much: "We want Iran to be recognized as a member of the nuclear club, that means Iran be recognized as a country having the nuclear fuel cycle, and enriching uranium."

The issue is how to deal with the problem. As always, Europe is more interested in process than results and wants to keep the dialogue alive....

But even with thousands of U.S. troops breathing down the mullahs' necks, Iran seems determined to soft-pedal the negotiations and to draw them out. Europe's diplomacy, ostensibly designed to bring about a peaceful solution, is so inadequate that it may actually create a situation where nothing short of military intervention will stop the Iranians from acquiring the ultimate weapon.

If diplomacy is to have any chance, the Western world needs to up the ante. All the Europeans are telling the Iranians at the moment is that if they don't play ball the EU won't sign an extended trade agreement. But Teheran knows that with its current human rights record and last month's sham elections, even the EU couldn't justify extending economic ties.

Europe must be willing to drag Iran before the U.N. Security Council. It must threaten economic sanctions and go through with them if necessary. Given that Europe is Iran's biggest trading partner, this would seriously hurt the mullahs. Iran clearly wants to muscle its way into the select fraternity of nuclear-armed nations. But if the weak-kneed "diplomacy" of the West allows that to happen, we may as well write off non-proliferation policy and let everyone who wants to extract nuclear blackmail in the door.