

IRAN: FRONTLINES AND PERSPECTIVES

Hamid R. Khalaj

Research Associate, Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs

The persistence and continuity of the Green Movement of the Iranian people which reached its peak of political radicalism on Ashura has resulted in the emergence of unprecedented frontiers and groupings in various aspects. For the first time the idea of major political transition and even regime change has emerged on the agenda of the Western Powers as a fact which can be a potential solution to the nuclear issue with the Islamic Republic. The United States, for one, has focused on supporting the opposition in Iran while at the same time constantly questioning the reliability of Ahmadinejad's government and endorsing the Green Movement.

The linings in political scene of Iran have become more evident now. In the pro-government camp, including all hardline and centrist fundamentalist parties, fear of downfall of the Islamic Republic is obvious. Consequently three perspectives are competing as to the way to handle the crisis. Radical extremists prefer the policy of bloodbath which desires an ever more macro scale violent and suppressive altercation of the Green Movement. This policy demands a direct and merciless confrontation by eliminating those behind the post presidential election chaos up to Ayatollah Rafsanjani, the chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council and the Assembly of Experts. Ironically, he was the one who played the most part in making Ayatollah Khamenei the Supreme Leader following Ayatollah Khomeini's death.

The more moderate elements of the fundamentalist camp prefer negotiation and compromise with the figurative leaders of the Green Movement. They expect defiant figures like Mousavai and Karoubi to retreat from their initial demand regarding annulment of the presidential election. Furthermore, they are asked to make a clear-cut separation from those questioning the regime's coup and crackdown to favor the choice of the establishment over the people's vote and publicly condemn them.

The third perspective is that of the Supreme Leader himself which is still indecisive between massive eradication and/or moderate concession. Nevertheless, he advocates the power of fear and applies all means to implement that. Though, his public announcement as the enforcer of the coup against the very constitutional principles of the Islamic Republic came as an extreme shock. Lately even Ahmadinejad has kept quiet about all relevant affairs and the Revolutionary Guard generals have avoided public political comments due to the leader's personal takeover of command.

As for the Green Movement, following the events of 6th of December, the burial of the Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, and the day of Ashura a clear distinction has emerged. The division is an indication of contradictory views in some parts of the Movement. Some elements partially seek going beyond the regime and the concept of Velayat Faqih through revolutionary methods. But the figurative

leadership of the Movement insists on remaining within the framework of the Islamic Republic and its constitution. The reactions to the last statement of Mr. Mousavi were indicative of such fact. Most academics and intellectuals and some political activists inside Iran and abroad gladly received it. Yet, minor segments of the Movement considered it to be a clear setback from the major initial demand of annulment of the election. There were also modern religious thinkers who considered it as the floor base of the Movement. They went further to conclude that avoiding the demand for removal of Ahmadinejad from office has been due to the heated environment following the bloody Ashura. However, in a seemingly coordinated effort in abroad this group once more insisted on the annulment of the election and removal of the coup government. Indeed, even among the modern thinkers there are serious differentiations on their view of the system of governance. There are those who are definite seculars and those who still believe in the Islamic Republic in its original form. Still, the uniformity of the effort results from the dominant democratic view among the whole body of the Movement suggesting that differences should be left to voting ballots in a free referendum for people to choose. It is commonly agreed among most, though, that the obvious strategy requires a well tuned view of the realities of the situation. The foremost significant aim should be to avoid massive and brutal suppression of the Movement. Thus, the figurative leadership of the Movement endeavors to play the scene in a way which would create conflicting divisions amongst hardliners. This approach stipulates the non-interference of the Supreme Leader and the rule of law to be applied by the Parliament to remove the coup government and the Judiciary Power to punish those responsible for the inapprehensible violence against the people.

Another contradiction in the Movement comes from two different perspectives on the essence of the Iranian society. Most of modern religious thinkers take the Iranian Society to be essentially religious. A society which consists of a definite majority of Shia Muslims. They assume that the Movement's aim should be to shift the absolutism of Velayat Faqih to a conditional one. On the other hand, large segments of the movement, despite being faithful Muslims or not, support a secular democracy. They believe that the Islamic Republic will take away the rest of religious remains among Iranian people.

But the main contradiction results from two various views over the essence of the regime and the manner of transition toward democracy. Some believe that this regime is an ideologue despotic regime which, if necessary, would kill a million people to stay in power. It is suggested better for the Green Movement to accept this bitter reality and avoid any violent confrontation. Instead the Movement should focus on promotion of civil institutions, change the behavior of the regime, and reform its repressive ways through a gradual and lengthy process. This view rejects radicalization of the Movement and recommends success and expedience over precision.

The other view puts forward that the regime is a totalitarian dictatorship which has rejected any reform. It believes that the mentality of the rulers do not in any manner match with that of the people yet all the wealth of the nation is at

their discretion. It concludes there is no way that the establishment would risk the opportunity by giving way to democratic reforms which would jeopardize their seemingly firm position. This view advocates a more confrontational approach for transition to a secular democracy by means of a referendum.

But despite these contradictions, the significant common grounds of the Green Movement rely on the internationally recognized human and civil rights, social justice, application of national resources for the betterment of the people, religious and minority rights, gender equality in all aspects, non-discrimination, cooperation with all countries based on mutual interests and respect, and peace and harmony for the whole international community.