

RELEASE IN PART  
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**From:** sbwhoeop [redacted]  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 18, 2009 9:53 AM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** fyi

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FYI, Gary Sick's latest analysis on Iran below (posted on his blog). Sick has independent sources and is very well informed.

June 17, 2009

Is this another Iranian revolution?

To someone who has watched and studied the Iranian revolution of 1979 with fascination, developments in Iran today have an eerie reminiscence. Then there were massive protests that filled the streets, often marching in dignified but ominous silence; there was bloodshed as nervous security men with guns faced determined but unarmed crowds; there were sullen mourning parades; there were catchy chants and ritual calls of "Down with the shah!"; at night the rooftops rang with shouts of *allahu akbar*.

You need only change "shah" to "dictator," and you have a description of what is happening in Iran today.

But there is one very big difference. Thirty years ago, Iran had a charismatic cleric named Ayatollah Khomeini who had a refined sense of strategy and a willingness to risk everything for the cause he represented. On the other side was Mohammed Reza Shah, who had been on the throne for some 37 years and who commanded one of the most powerful military and security regimes in the world. On the surface it appeared to be an uneven battle – guns against turbans – but the ruler with the guns wavered and the turbans grew in size and confidence until the old order collapsed.

Today the nominal leader of the opposition forces is a reformed radical, Mir Hossein Mousavi, who is notably lacking in personal charisma. On the other side is the constitutional Leader, Ayatollah Khamene'i, who is widely perceived as a cautious political animal with limited qualifications for his religious post and who compensates for his own lack of charisma by manipulation of the political system and the institutions most loyal to him – particularly the politically minded clergy and the powerful security forces, including the Revolutionary Guards.

Neither of these men seems to be fully in control of their own forces, let alone the situation. The fraudulent election defeat of Mousavi was a triggering event, but the energy behind these unprecedented demonstrations is due more to the sense of outrage and betrayal at the gross manipulation of numbers by the regime than it is about any undying devotion to Mousavi. Yesterday Mousavi ordered that people stay home in face of a conflicting pro-regime demonstration. They marched anyway (and the daughter of former president Rafsanjani joined them and urged them on). Mousavi then "ordered" everyone to march the following day (which they were probably going to do with or without his orders).

Khamene'i announced the "divine assessment" of the election outcome – even before it would probably have been physically possible to count the more than 40 million ballots. Then, in the face of mass protests, he ordered an investigation of the results by the Guardian Council – the same organization that was responsible for managing the election in the first place. No one believed him in either case, and no one expected anything of importance from the Guardian Council. Khamene'i has ordered peace and reconciliation. No one paid any attention.

I deliberately did not mention president-elect Ahmadinejad. After celebrating his "victory," he went off to a largely symbolic meeting in Moscow. He seems to be out of the decision loop and more of a passive player than a major actor in these events.

So who is calling the shots? Mousavi seems to be running along after the crowd, not leading it. But that is probably all that is required to keep the protest in motion.

**On the other side, the very little evidence we have suggests that the important decisions are being made by the ultra-conservative leadership of the Revolutionary Guards, whose political role has ballooned over the past decade, perhaps in cooperation with their extremist counterparts in the clergy. They are utterly ruthless and ideologically fueled.**

**New York Times columnist Nick Kristoff reminded us several days ago (see blog item on June 15 below) *at the end of the day, as I saw at Tiananmen 20 years ago, when Might and Right do battle, it's often prudent to bet on Might, at least in the short run.***

**The regime seems to have miscalculated badly. They seemed to believe that a sudden coup – the announcement of dramatic election results followed by a show of force – would intimidate and silence the opposition and consolidate their control. That is perhaps more understandable if the decisions were being made by military leaders who tend to see the battle in Manichaeian terms, rather than politicians such as Khamene'i who are accustomed to seeing shades of gray. In any event, it backfired and they now have a much larger crisis on their hands than if they had simply arranged for Ahmadinejad to win by a slim margin (which was at least believable).**

**All parties are now in uncharted territory. A significant portion of the Iranian population seems to have concluded that their social contract with the rulers – accepting Islamic rule in return for a respectful regard for the opinion of the governed, an Islamic Republic – is no longer valid. They do not trust their rulers.**

**The rulers, whose support has been declining for years in the face of their own inept management of the country, are increasingly replacing popular support with repression. This election seems to have called that tactic into question. For the military, the obvious answer is more repression. So it would appear to be a moment to bet on Might.**

**But nobody is fully in command of events. Decisions taken in the next weeks will be fateful and could determine the future path of the Iranian revolution.**

**There is another lesson as Iran's leaders contemplate a Tiananmen moment. When the Tiananmen crackdown occurred almost exactly ten years ago, one of the leaders of China at the time was Zhao Ziyang, General Secretary of the Communist Party. He was later fired and placed under house arrest. His smuggled memoirs have just appeared, revealing the depth of disagreements within the leadership about how to proceed.**

**Is it possible that ten years from now we will have a volume describing the intense debates that one can only presume are underway today in the highest councils of the Islamic Republic of Iran?**

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