

Reflecting on Iran's Presidential Election: A Political Economy Perspective

By Ismael Hossein-zadeh (July 2009)

1. Questions that Beg to be Asked

US and European corporate media, political pundits and “Iran experts” have spent countless hours discussing the June presidential election in Iran. Yet, they have utterly failed to ask a number of central questions that beg to be asked:

Why did Mir Hossein Mousavi, the main rival of President Ahmadinejad, declare himself the winner while voting was still in progress? Since there are no exit polls in Iran, how could he have known for sure he was the winner when the votes were not yet counted? (According to some accounts he declared victory barely an hour after the polls closed; according to others he did so hours before the polls closed. His own and his campaign's statements show that, in fact, they declared victory before, during and immediately after the voting. For example, his wife Zahra Rahnavard, one of his major campaigners, told BBC News during an interview the day before the Election Day that her husband would score a big, four-to-one, win against Ahmadinejad; and that the only way Ahmadinejad could win would be through fraud. How did she know that?)

How could this premature announcement of victory be explained? Was it because Mr. Mousavi's campaign managers led him to become truly delusional, sincerely believing he could not lose? Or, was it a deliberate preemptive measure to replace Ahmadinejad regardless of who actually won at the ballot box?

And why did Mr. Mousavi declare the election stolen the moment he learned he had actually lost? How did he know it was stolen, except for the fact that the official account contradicted his campaign's wishful projections? For at least three days his claim of “stolen” election remained just that. Even when he was forced to substantiate his allegation, he submitted to the Guardian Council, the body responsible for overseeing the election, a long list of electoral irregularities that, while true, did not constitute a pattern of coordinated or systematic effort at stealing the election [1].

Further, what compelled Mr. Mousavi to go for the jugular—either another election or a “green revolution”—instead of going through the country's legal and institutional channels, which have administered or presided over ten clean, undisputed presidential elections since the 1979 revolution? Knowing that another election was out of the question, he immediately called upon his supporters to take to the streets and start the projected revolution. Why?

It is often argued that Mr. Mousavi's rationale for sidestepping the institutional and legal frameworks governing the electoral process was because he did not trust them. But this argument raises even more questions about his mysterious behavior. He was nominated

as a presidential candidate within Iran's electoral laws and procedures. On the basis of those laws and procedures, he was vetted and approved by the Guardian Council, the responsible authority for overseeing the election. The Guardian Council's screening of candidates before they can run for President is often criticized as undemocratic, and therefore objectionable. But that was obviously not a problem for Mr. Mousavi as he went through and came out of the screening process with flying colors. And he ran a highly successful and well-financed (indeed, extravagant) campaign without any legal or institutional obstacles. Why, then, the sudden about face: the abrupt rejection of and rebellion against the country's electoral laws and institutions?

Mr. Mousavi used the term "green revolution" to label his campaign. But color-coded revolutions, as carried out in Eastern Europe and former Soviet republics, are synonymous with electoral coups: a scheme of participating in an election process with the intention of not accepting defeat at the ballot box. The question then arises: "Why would there be a 'green revolution' prepared prior to the vote, especially if Mousavi and his supporters were as confident of victory as they claim?" as astutely pointed out by Paul Craig Roberts [2].

2. Electoral Coups as Color-coded Revolutions

Having mulled over these questions long and hard, I can think of only two interpretations of Mr. Mousavi's assertion of "stolen elections." The charitable interpretation is that he was led by his campaign architects to honestly believe he could not lose. The more likely interpretation, however, is that he colluded with the powerful interests behind his campaign not to accept defeat. Either way, the inescapable conclusion is that contrary to Mr. Mousavi's claim that Ahmadinejad stole the election, it seems more likely that, in fact, it was his own campaign architects who were determined to hijack the election.

Although his campaign managers characterize his unsuccessful bid to unseat Ahmadinejad as "green revolution," post-election revelations indicate, however, that it was more akin to an attempt at a political or electoral coup than a bona fide campaign that is prepared to accept the Majority vote. It is one thing to use the electorate's discontent with the status to win an election—most politicians running for public office do this. It is quite another, however, to take advantage of their dissatisfaction to defy the election results [3].

Whether by chance or by design or by the logic of objective circumstance on the ground, Mr. Mousavi's "green revolution" bore an uncanny resemblance to previous color-coded revolutions in Eastern Europe and former Soviet Republics. Like the campaigns to bring to power pro-market and pro-Western regimes in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004), his campaign was engineered and managed by powerful business interests who are known to be pursuing similar objectives. As with the campaign headed by Mr. Mousavi, the campaigns led by Saakashvili in Georgia and Yushchenko in Ukraine styled themselves reformist and democratic while promoting the neoliberal, or trickle-down, economic policies favored by big business and/or transnational capital.

Social forces behind “color revolutions” are rooted in the transnational capitalists’ drive to integrate and unify global markets, more or less after the model of unbridled economic liberalism. The powerful economic interests behind that drive operate from both the core capitalist countries, especially the US, as well as the “peripheral” or less-developed countries targeted for “regime change.” Their activities, formally billed as “non-violent” or “soft-power” operations, are designed to supplement the long-standing globalization mission of multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

On the US side, such activities are carried out by a number of government-funded think tanks like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), Center for International Private Enterprise, the International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, Foundation for Democracy in Iran, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and a number of other agencies and NGOs. On the side of the countries targeted for “reform” and “regime change,” architects of “color revolutions” are interchangeably called the oligarchs, the nouveau riche, or the comprador bourgeoisie. Who are these indigenous allies of transnational capitalism?

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, large scale privatization of public enterprises became rampant in Russia and other former republics of the Soviet Union. All kinds of “experts” of nation-building on a capitalist basis, especially neoliberal economic advisors from the United States, played key roles in crafting those highly scandalous privatization schemes. By virtue of privatizing public property on the cheap, many of the leaders of the newly independent states managed to become very rich very quickly—they have since come to be known as oligarchs. (Michael Hudson, Professor of Economics at the University of Missouri, calls them “kleptocrats,” denoting corrupt ruling elites that seek power and personal gain at the expense of the public.)

But the newly acquired private fortunes needed freedom from the remnants of the Soviet-era legal and institutional “constraints” such as labor laws (that guaranteed life-time employment), universal healthcare, cradle-to-grave free education, and the like. To break free from these “restraining” laws and traditions, the oligarchs also needed political or state power that would go along with their economic power, i.e., would allow them to conduct their economic affairs according to unhindered market mechanism.

The oligarch’s desire to bring about legal, political and institutional changes to better serve their nefarious economic interests coincided with the globalization designs of US imperialism to bring about “regime change” in those countries in order to carry out pro-American economic and foreign policies. This explains the convergence of the interests of the imperialist and the home-grown bourgeoisies on removing “undesirable regimes” from power.

Most commentators trace the origins of the US doctrine of “color revolutions,” and the concomitant concept of “soft power” or “non-violent struggle,” to the 1990s. But a

number of political historians, including Thierry Meyssan, president of the Voltaire Network, trace it back to the 1970s:

This concept appeared in the 90s, but its roots lie in the American public debate of the 70s-80s. After a string of revelations about CIA-instigated coups around the world, as well as the dramatic disclosures of the Church and Rockefeller Senate Committees, Admiral Stansfield Turner was given the task by President Carter to clean up the agency and to stop supporting 'local dictatorships.' Furious, the American Social Democrats (SD/USA) left the Democratic Party and sided with Ronald Reagan. . . . After Reagan was elected, he charged them with pursuing the American interference policy, this time using different methods. This is how the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was created in 1982 and the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) in 1984 [4].

Philip Giraldi, former officer of the United States Central Intelligence Agency, presently a partner in an international security consultancy (Cannistraro Associates), describes the US designs of "soft power" and/or "color revolutions" as follows:

Where regime change coming out of Washington might once have been done covertly by the CIA, it is now done openly by a number of organizations that are ostensibly "private" but are in reality funded by the government, the NGOs and others that Vladimir Putin and others have been complaining about. . . . The money and effort that is being channeled through NGOs is being used to change the way many countries are governed, to make them become more democratic or at least more cooperative with Europe and the United States. The countries on the receiving end are more often than not completely aware of what is going on. Frequently, the western media jumps on the band wagon to complete the job, hailing the arrival of democracy in yet another poor benighted land while carefully ignoring the corruption of the newly minted democratic leaders.

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), with its bipartisan International Republican Institute and its National Democratic Institute wings, is the chief culprit, but the US Agency for International Development also is involved, funded under the Freedom Support Act. The National Endowment for Democracy, which funds changing governments overseas and has virtually no oversight, would in any other guise be proscribed as a dangerous underground group. . . . What do these organizations do when they set out to overturn a government? They would not be so unwise as to appear adversarial or cast themselves as revolutionaries, so they instead describe themselves in the most benign terms while becoming enablers for others who wish to "create democracy." They understand above all that the ability to protest and force the change of governments is not new but that the new technologies have changed the entire game [5].

The degree and details of the US involvement in the Post-Soviet color revolutions may be debatable. There is no question, however, that the US money, media and "expertise" played a significant role in the success of those revolutions [6].

Briefly, here is how color-coded revolutions in Eastern Europe and for Soviet republics such as Georgia and Ukraine were carried out.

1. During the campaign season the oligarchs (in concert with the US media and other agents of “soft power” projection) started extensive and exaggerated negative campaigns against the targeted incumbents in their respective countries. This was designed to frighten the people of the prospects of the re-election of the incumbents.
2. Also prior to the election day, the oligarchs and their external allies circulated exaggerated projections of their candidates’ chances for victory, portraying them as invincible, often with the help of self-serving pre-election polls. (US money, “experts” and media played important roles in conducting such convenient opinion polls.)
3. On the election day, the oligarch’s candidates declared victory either before the polls were actually closed, or before the official accounts of the voting results were announced. This was designed to discredit the official count of the votes cast. The longer the time period between the opposition’s premature, or preemptive, declaration of victory and the time of the official announcement of the voting results, the more plausible the opposition’s claim that the government must have been “fixing” the votes.
4. As soon as the official results were announced, contradicting the opposition’s premature victory announcement, the oligarchs and their candidate cried foul: “we told you they were stealing your votes.”
5. Determined not to accept defeat, the opposition then called upon their supporters (and the public at large) to take to the streets to “defend democracy” and retrieve their “stolen votes.”

If the scenario thus painted seems like a conspiracy theory, it is because those color revolutions were actually conspiratorial designs. “The main mechanism of the ‘color revolutions’ consists in focusing popular anger on the desired target. This is an aspect of the psychology of the masses which destroys everything in its path and against which no reasonable argument can be opposed. The scapegoat is accused of all the evils plaguing the country for at least one generation. The more he resists, the angrier the mob gets. After he gives in or slips away, the normal division between his opponents and his supporters reappears” [7].

Just as the oligarchs in Eastern Europe and former Soviet republics acquired their riches and resources by virtue of their positions within the state apparatus, so too the Iranian rich and powerful have gained their unearned assets by virtue of their positions within the state bureaucracy. Also like their post-Soviet counterparts in Eastern Europe, Iran’s nouveau riche have gradually begun to view welfare-state programs, which were put in place immediately following the 1979 revolution, burdensome and constraining to the unhindered utilization of their ill-begotten capital. Not surprisingly, they too have acquired an appetite for a “color revolution” to unseat Ahmadinejad’s government and

remove the “constraints” of welfare-state to the “efficient” operations of unbridled market system.

It follows that economic conditions, or business interests, favoring a “color revolution” in Iran have actually existed or evolved within its own socio-economic circumstances. Although powerful external forces of destabilization may have magnified the impact and the influence of internal forces of “regime change,” the fact remains that tendencies to replace Ahmadinejad also evolved domestically. It is therefore critically important to avoid the simplistic either-or arguments when discussing the destabilizing roles played by external and internal forces in the scheme of “regime change” in Iran. Since there was a convergence of interests between the two forces over the removal of Ahmadinejad from power, their efforts to achieve this goal inevitably reinforced each other—regardless of the existence, or lack thereof, of any active or conscious link between the two.

Contrary to the widespread perception in the West, especially in the United States, the 1979 revolution in Iran was not simply the product of a religious or culturally-driven rebellion against Western values. More importantly, it was the product of a truly national front against the rule of the dictatorial Shah (king) and his imperial supporters from outside. It included both secular and religious nationalists, the socialist groups, and the masses of the poor and working people who were driven by hopes of a better life following the success of the revolution.

Not only did the grassroots demand from the revolution basic political rights such as civil equality and individual liberty, but more importantly, certain economic rights such as universal healthcare and a strong public support for education. The working class, headed by strong and militant unions, developed especially high expectations of better living conditions of the revolution. Not only did they play a crucial role in bringing down the Shah’s regime (by bringing major industries, especially the oil industry, to a standstill), but also managed to run all the major industries—in effect, the national economy—independently for nearly a year, during and immediately after the revolution.

The grassroots’ hopes and expectations that were thus enlivened by the revolution were further reinforced by the 8-year (1980-88) war with Iraq, and the concomitant economics of war. For one thing, the war-time conditions led to an even bigger public sector economy, which provided for the basic needs of millions of the poor and working people. For another, the war was fought disproportionately at the expense of the poor and working classes who made heroic sacrifices in fending off the imperialist instigated invasion of Iran by Saddam Hussein. Not surprisingly, those who made the lion’s share of sacrifices in defending the country also expected certain economic rights in terms of employment, education, healthcare, and the like.

Following the war, however, the successive administrations of Presidents Rafsanjani (1989-97) and Khatami (1997-2005) methodically hammered away at the foundations of social safety-net programs (that were put in place by virtue of the early revolutionary years and the war economy) in order to free market forces from the “constraints” of welfare state. President Rafsanjani’s “structural adjustment program,” a neoliberal market

liberalization promoted by the International Monetary Fund around the world, which hastened the pace of deregulation and privatization of public enterprises, was bitterly resisted by the overwhelming majority of the Iranian people.

As the 16 years of Rafsanjani and Khatami presidencies gradually deregulated the market and privatized public property, they also facilitated the rise of Iran's nouveau riche, or oligarchs. Ordinary Iranians resent the nouveau riche (who are sarcastically called *agha-zadeh*, or the sons and daughters of the corrupt elite) not because they are rich, but because most of them became rich by virtue of what amounts to embezzlement and predatory privatization of public property. Resentment is especially poignant among the ranks of the poor and working classes who not long ago fought valiantly for eight years to preserve both the revolutionary ideals and national sovereignty, but are now witnessing what they view as "betrayal" of those ideals by the former revolutionaries who have become corrupt and compromising elders within the state and other powerful bureaucracies, including many in the clerical establishment.

The 1979 revolution placed many critical issues on the national agenda, but left most of them largely unresolved. This was especially true concerning issues of class or economic justice. In a sense, the revolution left the fate of the Iranian economy in a limbo: neither capitalism nor socialism, in the classic senses of these terms. This explains the persistent tug of war, or class struggle, between proponents of social justice, on the one hand, and those of economic liberalism, on the other. It also explains the continuing or recurring revolutionary atmosphere in Iran. It further explains the rise of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Iran's presidency as a clear expression of an unmistakable blowback against the rich and corrupt establishment.

3. The Rise of Ahmadinejad

When Khatami's second term as president expired in 2005, Ahmadinejad entered the presidential race as the candidate of the "voiceless" grassroots, determined to reverse what he called "the revolution's steady slide to the Right" during the 16 years (1989-2005) of the Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations. After a hiatus of eight years, Rafsanjani too entered the 2005 presidential race. The initially-asymmetrical competition between the well-known and all-powerful Rafsanjani and the little-known Ahmadinejad, one of the seven children of a blacksmith, seemed to resemble a case of David versus Goliath. Apprehensive of Rafsanjani's big-business solutions to economic problems, ordinary Iranians mobilized behind Ahmadinejad, thereby delivering Rafsanjani the defeat of his lifetime. It is generally believed in Iran that having lost at the ballot box, Rafsanjani and his elite allies set out to sabotage Ahmadinejad's agenda of economic reform that would favor the poor and working classes.

Contrary to most politicians who renege on their campaign promises after they are elected, Ahmadinejad has proven relentless in pursuing the fulfillment of his campaign promises. His 2005 campaign gave voice to segments of the Iranian people previously shut out from the process. He has since stood firm for them. At a public event in October

2006, Ahmadinejad announced the idea of “Justice Shares,” where the state would divide shares (stocks) to some major state-owned companies among 4.6 million of Iran’s grassroots. These shareholders of national wealth would pay only half of the market price for the stocks they thus received; the other half would be paid over time from the proceeds, or dividends, of those share.

Although his political opponents have occasionally called him a “socialist” (presumably designed to stir up the religious establishment against him), Ahmadinejad is no socialist. Nor are the social safety net programs he advocates as radical as those promoted by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, or Evo Morales in Bolivia. He is neither against private property, nor a market economy. He is for a mixed economy in which state ownership in important industries (such as oil and gas) would coexist side-by-side with a regulated market structure that would not leave anyone unprotected against the woes and vagaries of an unbridled market mechanism. He trusts neither the big, unregulated business, nor the strong, independent workers’ organizations. Although he is sympathetic of the workers’ needs and struggles, he is wary of their independent power; it is a paternalistic, “big brother” or authoritarian kind of support and sympathy.

When Ahmadinejad took office in 2005, he set out to fight and eliminate the “oil mafia,” the powerful private interests (including the Rafsanjani family) that have lucrative stakes in the publicly-owned oil industry, and who have constantly been pushing for privatization of the industry. He tried to wrest control of key ministries, especially oil, replacing the market-friendly officials appointed by Rafsanjani and Khatami with his own choices. It was not until 2007, however, that he was able to install his candidate for oil minister, also head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NOIC), Gholamhossein Nozari. Indeed, for nearly a year, Ahmadinejad did not have a full cabinet because a number of his choices were rejected by powerful opponents in the fiercely contentious parliament.

The oil and gas revenue, which would be profits of giant oil companies in a country like the United States, is instead used to fund most of government investments and expenditures. This is the source of government’s ability to invest in both human capital such as health and education, and physical capital or infrastructure such as roads, bridges, mass transit, dams, and the like—investments that are crucial to the ideals of long-term economic growth and social prosperity. (Ideally, a nation should not be dependent so much on its natural resources for its budgetary needs; but Iran, like many other less-developed countries, has not yet reached the level of industrialization necessary to be less dependent on revenue from oil.)

Budgetary decisions on the allocation of national resources have traditionally been quite centralized in Iran: all national revenues, coming largely from the sale of oil and natural gas, would be collected by and then allocated from Tehran. This mechanism disproportionately favored major metropolitan centers at the expense of the provinces and the countryside. It also unduly favored major government contractors and influential corporate interests at the expense of small, less-competitive enterprises and producers. Since his election in 2005, Ahmadinejad has been fighting hard to bring about a modicum

of fairness in the allocation of national resources by trying to somewhat decentralize budgetary decision making, and redirect an equitable share of resources to the grassroots and the countryside.

While his efforts to bring a degree of fairness in the distribution of national resources have been very popular with the grassroots, they have incensed the affluent, economic “experts,” and technocratic or managerial elite. “The president has especially enraged the managerial class with his wildly popular monthly rallies in the provinces, where he orders funding on the spot for the infrastructure needs of common folks. . . . Several of his advisors and cabinet ministers and even a Central Bank's director general have stepped down or been dismissed after challenging the president's "unscientific" intervention in markets. At least one of them, former economic affairs minister Davood Danesh Jafari, campaigned for a rival [presidential] candidate this spring” [8].

Ahmadinejad's opponents have labeled his spending adjustments in favor of the poor and working classes as “handouts” that, as Rafsanjani put it, would lead to *gadaparvari* (nurturing poverty). This sinister argument (which, by the way, is typical of the champions of laissez-faire economics) suffers from a number of shortcomings.

To begin with, the rich and powerful who characterize Ahmadinejad's social spending as “handouts” are not very consistent in their calls for the curtailment or abolition of government subsidies. Following the 1979 revolution and the war economy of the 1980-88 period, the government subsidized many consumer items that benefited all citizens regardless of their income levels! Although some modifications have been made over the years, many such blanket, or “class-neutral,” subsidies remain in effect to this day. These include subsidies for a number of food items, especially bread, as well as sources of energy or fuel, both home-heating and motor vehicle fuels. This means that the wealthy buy such subsidized items at the same prices as do the needy!

Furthermore, because the affluent consume relatively more of the subsidized goods and services, they end up benefiting disproportionately more from government subsidies than the grassroots. “Gasoline subsidies are an example where the rich benefit most because they tend to have bigger, gas-guzzling vehicles, while the poor may not even be able to afford a small car. . . . ‘Currently, subsidies are not useful and have the reverse effect of what was intended,’ he [Ahmadinejad] said in comments carried by the official newspaper *Iran*, adding that 70 percent of subsidy spending ended up with the country's richest 30 percent” [9].

President Ahmadinejad has been trying hard to bring an end to the insanity of subsidizing the wealthy. “Rationalization of subsidies” (*bahineh kardan-e subsidha*), as Ahmadinejad has frequently explained, means eliminating price subsidies altogether, and then having the government use the financial resources thus saved for direct assistance to the needy—similar to the use of food stamps or cash payments to the needy in the United States. Not only is this a more sensible system of subsidizing the needy, it will also save the government money because the funds saved by virtue of cutting blanket price subsidies is much more than direct subsidies to the needy, according to both the Ahmadinejad

administration and independent financial experts. Ahmadinejad's efforts to alter a perverse subsidy system, however, have so far been successfully blocked by the powerful interests who oppose them, by the hypocritical forces who label assistance to the needy "handouts" but are unwilling to give up their own subsidies.

Secondly, and more importantly, it is sheer cynicism to characterize social spending and assistance to the needy as "handouts." While social expenditures include some cash disbursements to the needy, the major bulk of those expenditures can be more appropriately called investment in public capital formation. These include both human capital, such as health and education, and physical capital, such as mass transit, communications systems, transportation networks, dams, and the like.

Thanks to government support there is now guarantee of medical care regardless of the ability to pay. Rural areas have gained electricity, paved roads, running (piped) water, crop insurance, insurance against natural disasters, and access to health and education services. Of course, Ahmadinejad does not get all the credit for these services because most of them came to existence by virtue of the 1979 revolution. He does, however, get credit for expanding and reinforcing them, as they were largely neglected by the previous two administrations, headed by Presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani.

During my recent trip to Iran (mid-March to early May), as I traveled to the countryside, including tribal communities, I learned that the government has in recent years boosted health insurance programs for both farming and tribal communities. Each village now has a full-time nurse, and every cluster of villages has a medical clinic that is built or housed in a centrally-located village. I also learned that family planning and the use of contraceptives are vigorously encouraged by government-sponsored health experts in the countryside.

Government spending on public health has paid off handsomely: according to World Bank statistics, in the three decades since the 1979 revolution, life expectancy in Iran has moved up from 59 to 71; child mortality at birth has gone down from 95 to below 30 per thousand; immunization rate (for Measles and DPT) has gone up from below 40% to 99%; and the average family size has shrunken from nine to four, which of course means the birth rate has gone down from seven to two.

The government also provides free education up to and including the college level for public schools and universities. (Private education institutions, which are quite expensive, do not get public assistance.) Even the children of tribal communities who travel with their live stock along the grazing routes now have access to free education. This is made possible by having (mobile) teachers travel with tribal communities. I have met a number of these teachers during my visits to Iran. One of them is a nephew of mine, who told me that one small tribe had only three school-age kids. Nonetheless, the education authorities of the region had assigned a teacher to the tribe to teach their children. Not surprisingly, according to World Bank statistics, literacy rate in Iran has during the past two decades moved up from 63% to slightly over 80%.

Although women are required to comply with the official dress code, they are encouraged (by both their families and the government) to excel in educational and professional pursuits. The results have been quite impressive. Women now constitute the majority of university students. They are doctors, engineers, teachers, scientists, writers, artists, salespersons, and even taxi drivers. More and more women are joining the workforce, despite the very high level of unemployment, which is largely due to criminal economic sanctions and military threats from abroad.

Characterizing social spending and government assistance to the needy as “handouts” is both cynical and elitist. It is also a disingenuous argument designed to camouflage the pro-capital biases of big-business interests. Proponents of economic liberalism have always used this snobbish argument to cut social spending in order to keep taxes low on the affluent, and deny the poor and working classes a decent degree of living conditions.

Not only is this selfish attitude of the wealthy unfair to those who suffer from the woes and vagaries of an unregulated capitalist economy, it is also short-sighted and counterproductive in terms of their own long-term interests. Instead of viewing social spending on infrastructure as a long-term investment that will help sustain and promote economic vitality, they view it as a burden, or overhead, that must be cut as much as possible. By focusing on the current, short-term balance sheets, they seem to be oblivious to the indirect, long-term returns to social spending. Evidence shows, however, that neglect of public capital formation can undermine long-term health, prosperity and productivity of a people.

Fighting corruption and trying to curtail or retrieve what he calls the “unearned” incomes of the corrupt establishment was one of the major agenda items of Ahmadinejad’s presidential campaign. Not only did this frighten the nouveau riche, but also many of the religious authorities who are not necessarily wealthy but whose comfortable positions of prestige and stature would be threatened by Ahmadinejad’s efforts to whittle down what he has called redundant bureaucracies. The elite had had enough.

Frightened by Ahmadinejad’s crusade-like commitment to fight corruption, waste and costly privileges, champions of economic liberalism poured money into Mousavi’s election campaign to unseat him. The presidential election of last June was their last stand against their clearly populist nemesis, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. (It is regrettable, as well as ironic, that while Ahmadinejad and his co-thinkers are at loggerheads with major segments of the clerical establishment, most of the Iranian opposition abroad fail to make any distinction between the two forces. Instead, in a largely emotional approach, they tend to lump all factions of Iran’s ruling circles together as a cohesive or monolithic body that pursues the same political or policy agenda.)

4. Mousavi and His Reform Agenda

The Opposition promoted Mousavi as the reform candidate. In his campaign speeches he frequently complained that Ahmadinejad’s administration was obstructing progress

because it resisted reform toward an “efficient” market system. What was his reform agenda?

Although Mousavi never really spelled out his much-celebrated economic reform agenda, the very little that he sparingly and vaguely revealed during the campaign season shows that it was essentially a capital-friendly reform scheme fashioned after the laissez-faire model of economics—often sugar-coated in obfuscationist market terminology such as market efficiency, entrepreneurial ingenuity, meritocracy, and the like. (This economic philosophy is interchangeably or synonymously called neoliberal, neoclassical, trickledown, or supply-side economics; it is also called economic, or classical, liberalism.)

I imagine the reason Mr. Mousavi never clearly explained his economic agenda was that he suspected that his ideas of economic liberalism would not have been very popular with the overwhelming majority of the Iranian people. Iranians had earlier experienced policies of economic liberalism under President Rafsanjani (1980-88), which was called “structural adjustment program.” Judging by people’s reactions to those policies, it is obvious that they did not care much for them.

It is no longer a secret that Hashemi Rafsanjani was the main pillar of Mousavi’s presidential campaign. “Since he was defeated by Ahmadinejad in the presidential elections of 2004,” points out Rostam Pourzal, “Rafsanjani has led a public crusade against the winner’s zeal for social spending, which he characterizes as *Gadaparvari*, or dependency promotion.” Using original (Farsi) documents, Pourzal further explains how Rafsanjani has for years been trying to modify Iran’s Constitution in order to facilitate the drive to deregulation and privatization:

The powerful state Expediency Council, which Rafsanjani heads, led a reinterpretation of Article 44 of Iran’s constitution that last June mandated a downsizing of the government in favor of private investors and contractors. The sale of state-owned industries is advancing faster than ever, and the introduction of private banking was followed late last year by the opening of the first foreign bank branch. . . . Yet Rafsanjani’s powerful allies complain bitterly in public that Ahmadinejad loyalists in the bureaucracy impede progress towards the competitive economy envisioned in the new law. This year Mousavi adopted Rafsanjani’s 2004 campaign pledge to institute “an economic revolution” in which improved efficiency would result from deregulation [10].

Mr. Mousavi expressed his economic agenda in short, cryptic and patchy statements that were scattered throughout his stump speeches and other campaign announcements. I sifted through almost all of those speeches and the one place, perhaps the only place, where I found all of his economic ideas together in one text was an article that appeared in the 25 May 2009 (4 Khordad 1388, Iranian calendar) edition of *Jomhuri Eslami* newspaper, titled “Mir Hossein Mousavi’s Program for the Improvement of the National Economy.” Briefly, the following are the main points of his economic reform agenda, as I

have summarized and translated them from Farsi into English (I am confident my summary reflects his economic reform ideas accurately).

The first and “the key principle for the solution of Iran’s economic difficulties,” according to Mr. Mousavi’s agenda, was “reform and redefinition of the executive branch of the government.” This would include reducing the size of the public sector, curtailing social spending, and bringing transparency and discipline to financial policies of the government.

The second major principle in his economic program focused on ways to open more space for business activities of the private sector, and “to promote the role of this sector in the decision making process of national economic policies.” Among other issues, this principle included adoption of policy measures that would expedite the process of market deregulation and revise constitutional “obstacles” to privatization of public enterprises. Combined with policy measures to curtail the public sector and the economic role of the government, these essential steps toward economic liberalization would be instrumental to the objective of “attracting foreign capital,” his program maintained.

Within these general principles, Mr. Mousavi occasionally (and, again, very vaguely) spoke of reducing poverty and unemployment and increasing homeownership, without explaining how he would achieve these objectives. Judging by his overall philosophy of economic reform, it is obvious, however, that he would rely on market efficiency, managerial knowhow, and individual or entrepreneurial ingenuity to achieve these goals. At one point in his “Program for the Improvement of the National Economy” he writes, “Today most economists believe that, within certain ethical framework, individuals’ pursuit of self-enrichment can lead to the collective well-being at the national level.”

This is, of course, the prima-facie beautiful but actually misleading motto of laissez-faire economic doctrine, and the major justifier of the unregulated, trickle-down economic philosophy. It is ironic at a time when this deceptive economic doctrine, which promotes greed as a virtue, is wreaking havoc in the core capitalist world Mr. Mousavi is trying to promote it in Iran.

A recurring theme in Mr. Mousavi’s economic agenda was bringing down the oppressively high rates of inflation in Iran, which he blamed on Ahmadinejad’s government. Why? Because, he argued, Ahmadinejad’s “out-of-control” social spending and/or subsidies to the poor and working classes gave them a strong purchasing power that, in turn, led to a strong demand and, therefore, high inflation. And what was his solution to bring inflation down? Simple: reduce the size of the public sector, cut social spending, and promote free enterprise and economic liberalism.

Both Mr. Mousavi’s diagnosis of inflation (social spending) and his prescription for fighting it (cutting that spending) are based on major theories of neoliberal economics, which are religiously promoted by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and WTO (World Trade Organization) throughout the world.

While Mr. Mousavi was sparing and ambiguous in terms of a positive policy agenda for change, he was quite openhanded and expansive on negative campaigning. In an unfair and obfuscationist manner, he blamed almost all of Iran's economic difficulties on Ahmadinejad, thereby overlooking the debilitating effects of economic and military pressures from abroad. A great deal of Iran's economic problems such as inflation and unemployment are due to the suffocating imperialist economic sanctions and military threats. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has been essentially under both an economic and military siege, ruthlessly inflicted by US imperialism and its allies. These destabilizing policies of economic strangulation have led to capital flight (both human and financial), hoarding and black-market activities by unscrupulous domestic capitalists, known as "economic mafias," and speculative investment in trade and real estate, instead of long-term investment in productive activities.

A product of the revolution and prime minister for eight years, Mr. Mousavi must be aware of these debilitating consequences of foreign interferences on the Iranian economy. Alas, he seems to be more interested in scoring political points against Ahmadinejad than abiding by the principles of fairness in judgment.

But then he also blamed Ahmadinejad and his "rash" foreign policy for the imposition of economic sanctions and military threats from abroad. Ahmadinejad's foreign policy has consisted of an uncompromising stance against the United States and its allies on the issue of Iran's legitimate right to nuclear energy, outspoken opposition to the colonial settler state of Israel, steadfast support for liberation movements in Palestine and Lebanon, and expanding friendly relations with revolutionary and progressive governments around the globe, including those of Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia.

Mousavi and his campaign managers labeled Ahmadinejad's foreign policy as "adventurous" and "confrontational," blaming it for Iran's economic difficulties. Accordingly, they sought "understanding" and "accommodation" with the United States and its allies, presumably including Israel, in order to achieve political and economic stability. While, prima facie, this sounds as a reasonable argument (in terms of neoliberal economic solutions to Iran's economic problems), it suffers from a number of shortcomings.

To begin with, it is a disingenuous and obfuscationist argument. Military threats and economic sanctions against Iran did not start with Ahmadinejad's presidency, as argued or implied by Mr. Mousavi's campaign. They were imposed on Iran nearly thirty years ago, essentially as punishment for its 1979 revolution that ended the imperialistic US influence over its economic, political and military affairs.

Second, it is naïve to think that US imperialism would be swayed by gentle or polite language to lift economic sanctions or remove military threats against Iran. During his two terms in office (8 years), the former president of Iran Muhammad Khatami frequently spoke of "dialogue of civilizations," counterposing it to the US Neoconservatives' "clash of civilization," effectively begging US imperialism for

dialogue and diplomatic rapprochement between Iran and the United States. His pleas of dialogue and friendship, however, fell on deaf ears. Why?

Because US policy toward Iran (or any other country, for that matter) is based on an imperialistic agenda that consists of a series of demands and expectations, not on diplomatic decorum, or the type of language its leaders use. These include Iran's giving up its lawful and legitimate right to civilian nuclear technology, as well as its compliance with the US-Israeli geopolitical designs in the Middle East. It is not unreasonable to argue that once Iran allowed US input, or meddling, into such issue of national sovereignty, it would find itself on a slippery slope the bottom of which would be giving up its independence: the US would not be satisfied until Iran becomes another "ally" in the Middle East, more or less like Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the like.

This is not theoretical; nor is it based on a dark or cynical suspicion. It is based on the historical record and the nature of US imperialism, which sees other countries or nations either as its allies or its enemies. It simply cannot see them as neutral, independent or sovereign countries. President George W. Bush bluntly expressed this attitude as "you are either with us or against us." While other Presidents may not put it so crudely, the policy continues to be a long standing hallmark of imperialistic US foreign policy.

It is ironic that Mr. Mousavi's reformist camp blames Ahmadinejad for the hostile imperialist policies toward Iran. For, US imperialism showed its most venomous hostility toward Iran during the presidency of Muhammad Khatami (1997-2005), while he was vigorously pursuing a path of friendship with the United States. While Khatami was promoting his "dialogue of civilizations" and taking conciliatory steps to befriend the US, including cooperation in the overthrow of the Taliban regime in the neighboring Afghanistan, George W. Bush labeled Iran as a member of the "axis of evil." This outrageous demonization was then used as a propaganda tool to justify calls for "regime change" in Iran.

In the face of President Khatami's conciliatory gestures toward the United States, many Iranians were so outraged by its unfair and provocative attitude toward Iran that they began to question the wisdom of Khatami's policy of trying to appease US imperialism. It is now widely believed that the frustration of many Iranians with Khatami's (one-sided) policy of dialogue with the United States played a major role in the defeat of his reformist allies in both the 2003 parliamentary elections and the 2005 presidential election. By the same token, it also played a major role in the rise of Ahmadinejad to Iran's presidency, as he forcefully criticized the reformists' attitude toward US imperialism as naïve, arguing that negotiation with the United States must be based on mutual respect, not at the expense of Iran's sovereignty.

Contrary to the claims of Mr. Mousavi and his "reformist" allies, Ahmadinejad is not against (unconditional) negotiation with the US. In fact, his administration has had (for the past several years) an open invitation for dialogue with the US. What he is against is submitting to imperialistic demands and conditions on a number of critical issues that would go to the heart of Iran's sovereignty.

Mr. Mousavi's blaming of Iran's economic difficulties on President Ahmadinejad (instead of imperialism's relentless economic and military pressures for the past 30 years) is tantamount to blaming the victim for the crimes of the perpetrator. Not only is this unfair, it also plays directly into the hands of Imperialism. Indeed, this is exactly what US imperialism and its allies have been pursuing (and hoping for) since the 1979 revolution: to exert so much economic and military pressure on Iran that it eventually breaks down, and "cries uncle," so to speak.

This is, by the way, what US imperialism did to the Sandinista government in Nicaragua in the 1980s. On the one hand, it supported the opposition to the Sandinistas, including support for the Nicaraguan terrorist organization called Contras; on the other, it strangled Nicaragua economically. The combined policies of destabilizing continued unabated until the US eventually succeeded to bring to power in Nicaragua a regime of its own liking [11].

In its zeal to destroy Ahmadinejad's record, Mr. Mousavi's campaign did not hesitate to also distort, tarnish, or downplay Iran's progress since the 1979 revolution. Despite all the shortcomings, the fact remains that the revolution ushered in significant progress in many social and economic areas of the Iranian society. These include extension of transportation, communication and electrification networks to the countryside; provision of free education and healthcare services for the needy; reduction of poverty and inequality; and more.

Iran has also made considerable progress in scientific research and technological know-how. All the oppressive economic sanctions by US imperialism and its allies have not deterred Iran from forging ahead with its economic development and industrialization plans. Indeed, Iran has viewed imperialism's economic sanctions and technological boycotts as a blessing in disguise: it has taken advantage of these sanctions and boycotts to become self-reliant in many technological areas.

For example, Iran is now self-sufficient in producing many of its industrial products such as home and electric appliances (television sets, washers and dryers, refrigerators, washing machines, and the like), textiles, leather products, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products and processed food and beverage products (including refined sugar and vegetable oil). The country has also made considerable progress in manufacturing steel, copper products, paper, rubber products, telecommunications equipment, cement, and industrial machinery. "Iran has the largest operational stock of industrial robots in West Asia" [12].

Iran's progress in automobile and other motor vehicle production has especially been impressive. Motor vehicles, including farming equipment, now count among Iran's exports. "As of 2001, there were 13 public and privately owned automakers within Iran. . . . These automakers produce a wide range of automobiles including motorbikes, passenger cars, vans, mini trucks, medium sized trucks, heavy duty trucks, minibuses,

large size buses and other heavy automobiles used in commercial and private activities in the country. Iran ranked the world's 16th biggest automaker in 2006" [13].

Most remarkable of Iran's industrial progress, however, can be seen in the manufacture of various types of its armaments needs. "Iran's defense industry has taken great strides in the past 25 years, and now manufactures many types of arms and equipment. Since 1992, Iran's Defense Industries Organization (DIO) has produced its own tanks, armored personnel carriers, guided missiles, radar systems, military vessels, submarines, and a fighter plane. . . . As of 2006, Iran had exported weapons to 57 countries, including NATO members." Compared with other countries, Iran's military budget is surprisingly modest. "Iran's 2005 defense budget was estimated to be \$6.2 billion (3.3% of GDP) [less than 1% of US military spending]...ranking the 67th largest defense expenditure globally" [14].

Perhaps most important of Iran's achievements since the 1979 revolution, however, has been its independence from the influence of foreign powers—something that many people in other countries in the region (and beyond) are envious of. Iran is perhaps the only country in the area that determines its own economic, political and military policies independently of foreign powers' advisors, guidelines and dictates. (This is, by the way, the main reason for US imperialism's hostility toward Iran. All other alleged reasons such as "weaponization of its nuclear technology, support for terrorism, existential threat to Israel, denial of Holocaust," and the like are no more than harebrained excuses for its evil plans of "regime change" in Iran.)

Just as Mr. Mousavi was vague and cryptic about his agenda of economic reform, so was he fuzzy on the issues of democracy and human rights. He spoke of individual liberty and human rights in such abstract and general terms as if human rights had nothing to do with the right to basic human needs such as food and shelter, or the right to affordable healthcare and public education. In this respect, too, Mr. Mousavi's agenda resembled those of the leaders of other color revolutions—for example, of Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia and of Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine. Had he succeeded in carrying out his "green revolution," his promises of democracy and human rights would have proven as hollow as those of his counterparts in Georgia and Ukraine.

The empty promises of democracy and human rights by leaders of color revolutions stems not so much from their personal traits as they do from the reform agendas they pursue. At the heart of those reform agendas is an economic restructuring program that is based on deregulation, curtailment of social spending and privatization of public enterprises. As such capital-friendly measures threaten the economic safety-net programs of the poor and working classes, they will resist, and sometimes rebel. And that's where the promised democracy of the "reform" leaders of color revolutions will end; they will not hesitate to call on their "security" forces to quell the grassroots' resistance to the curtailment of their basic needs.

This is, of course, not limited to the leaders of color revolution; it is in the nature of the so-called bourgeois (capitalist) democracy to bury the more critical economic rights of

the poor and working classes beneath the superficial, purely political individual rights, such as, for example, periodically voting to change the faces of politicians who hold public office without really changing their policy agendas in meaningful ways.

To suggest that Mousavi's projected "green revolution" bore all the major hallmarks of the previous color-coded revolutions, or that the subversive US agencies and policies for "regime change" supported and/or promoted his campaign, is not to suggest or imply that he (personally) collaborated with those agencies. Mr. Mousavi is no pawn of imperialism. But the logic of things, the mechanism of his campaign, or the internal dynamics of his agenda, inevitably led to an unmistakable convergence between the interests of imperialism, headed by the US, and those of Mousavi's campaign architects over the removal of Ahmadinejad from power. Not surprisingly, the two campaigns to overthrow Ahmadinejad complemented each other conveniently.

Whether this was purely coincidental or by design is hard to judge, unless one has irrefutable proof. Nor is the proof of such a link, or lack thereof, the primary focus of this essay. Rather, the more important point here is that by prematurely claiming election victory, and then recklessly insisting that the contrary voting results meant "stolen election," Mr. Mousavi was less than honest with his supporters, and the Iranian people in general. Whether he consciously agreed to this scheme of his campaign architects, or was really duped by those architects to sincerely (or delusively) believe he had won the elections, is of secondary importance. The more important point is that by so doing he effectively became the leader and the face of an electoral coup attempt—whether he was mindful of it or not, or whether he liked it or not.

The claim of "people's votes being stolen" is so loaded and so powerful that not only would the supporters of the opposition promptly rebel against the incumbent, but also many other citizens who may not have been supporters or sympathizers of the opposition but are angered by the thought of their votes being "stolen." While this scheme of power gabbing succeeded in Georgia, Ukraine and a number of other so-called "emerging democracies," it failed in Venezuela and Iran.

Part of the reason for the failure of Mr. Mousavi's "green revolution" was that his unscrupulous negative campaigning backfired—Ahmadinejad did not let him get away with it. To be sure, Mr. Mousavi did get away many falsehoods and distortions in his stump speeches during the campaign season. But when Ahmadinejad confronted him during the famous presidential debate of the week before the election date, Mousavi came up short. He did not offer much in the way of a positive agenda to his audience of more than 45 million Iranians who reportedly watched the debate. As Ahmadinejad successfully pinned him down to the notorious Rafsanjani and other rich and corrupt backers of his campaign, he basically sat there speechless. Although his campaign was increasingly catching up with that of Ahmadinejad during the previous three weeks, the debate effectively turned the tide.

During the debate, Ahmadinejad attacked Mousavi's affluent backers as leaders of the corrupt elite, now trying to claw back control. He threatened to curtail the waste and

inefficiency of many of the redundant monopolistic organizations, as well as re-take the “embezzled” people’s property from the oligarchs. He also bitterly complained about the resistance (by the representatives of the wealthy) to his idea of a progressive taxation system that would reduce Iran’s dependence on oil revenue. Most impressive and effective in terms of winning voters away from Mousavi, however, was his leafing through written documents that he said were evidence of scandalous privatizations, unscrupulous appropriation of public property, and predatory land grabbing by the pillars of Mousavi’s campaign during the presidencies of Khatami and Rafsanjani.

5. The Demonstrators

The suggestion that the Mousavi campaign seems to have planned a “green revolution” in the context of the presidential election, or that the projected revolution was enthusiastically supported by the forces of “regime change” from abroad, is not meant to discount the significance of the large number of sincere protesters who took to the street following the claim that their votes were “stolen.” In light of their huge numbers and their diversity, the protesters cannot be dismissed as simply or only the better-off and the better-educated. But while young protestors from different walks of the Iranian society joined the rallies, the leadership and the management of demonstrations rested largely with the powerful behind-the-scene interests and shadowy agitators [15].

Although the two relatively different types of protesters, the elite and the common folks, shared some grievances regarding social and/or cultural restrictions such as moral or dress codes, their economic needs and aspirations were vastly different. To the extent that young people from lower income strata participated in the protest rallies, they did so because they hoped for better employment opportunities and decent social safety-net programs such as support for public education, public health and other basic economic needs. These folks were largely unaware that a Mousavi victory would have, in fact, meant curtailing, not advancing, such economic safety-net programs.

By contrast, the oligarchs and their elite allies, that is, the leading or managing protestors, participated in protest rallies because they aspired to the consumerism and the life style of their counterparts in the West. They were also seeking free trade and investment opportunities with Western markets and transnational corporations. As Phil Wilayto, author of *In Defense of Iran*, points out, “They [the wealthy] aren't just opposing the government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—they're also objectively opposing millions of working-class Iranians who are trying to defend the social programs that have greatly improved their standard of living, programs that depend on the state ownership of the oil and gas industries” [16].

Contrary to protesters from among the ordinary citizens, the affluent demonstrators had no illusions about Mousavi’s “reform” agenda. They had, indeed, crafted that agenda. A telling indication of this point is the fact Rafsanjani (and his wealthy allies) constituted the backbone, the leading force, and financial benefactors of the Mousavi campaign. In 2005, the German newspaper *taz* provided a blunt profile of Rafsanjani and his family:

The man of God, who once earned a meager living preaching heavenly redemption for believers, now possesses a fortune estimated at more than a billion US dollars. He is Iran's largest exporter of pistachios. Together with his family, he owns several tourist centers both at home and abroad. His oldest son Mohsen is constructing the Tehran underground; his second son Mehdi is in the natural gas and oil business; his youngest son owns vast swathes of agricultural land; his two daughters Faezeh and Fatima are active in real estate both in Iran and abroad. Rafsanjani's cousins, nephews and nieces own a considerable portion of the domestic automobile industry, as well as controlling much of the export of pistachios and saffron, and the import of vehicles, paper and machines. A considerable part of Iran's black market is controlled by the Rafsanjani clan [17].

It is well known among Iranians that Rafsanjani and other influential backers of Mousavi are not motivated by concerns for the democratic and human rights of the Iranian people. Nor are they motivated by concerns for the plight of their economic conditions. "On the contrary," points out Bill Van Auken, a freelance reporter and an astute observer of Iranian politics, "they are proponents of a more rapid introduction of free market policies, an opening to foreign capital and closer ties with Washington, all of which they see as avenues for expanding their own wealth. Their indifference to the conditions confronting the broad masses of Iranian working people is expressed in their undisguised contempt for the limited social assistance programs introduced by Ahmadinejad, which they see as a waste of resources" [18].

Not only were many of the young protesters misled by the demagogic promises of the Mousavi campaign, they were also misled by the flood of propaganda that is constantly fed the Iranian people from abroad via internet and satellite media. Farsi-language radio and television propaganda broadcasts from the Los Angeles area by the opposition expatriates are especially deceptive to the Iranian youth. One of the challenges I recently faced during my visit to Iran (as well as during previous visits) was to reason with the young Iranians I spoke with to not believe everything they hear or see on these broadcast systems from abroad. They could not believe that, for example, there is unemployment, poverty and homelessness in the United States. The picture portrayed (by the opposition propaganda from abroad) of the living conditions in the US remains essentially the same as conveyed around the world via the glamorous Hollywood movies of long ago.

Mr. Mousavi and his supporters claim that post-election demonstrations in favor of his "green revolution" were altogether peaceful. Accordingly, they blame the government for the post-election violence and the crackdown on demonstrators. Reports by major Western media from Iran show, however, that it was, in fact, the protesters who started the violence. For example, on 13 June 2009 (the day after the Election Day) *The New York Times* reported from Tehran:

Farther down the street, clusters of young men hurled rocks at a phalanx of riot police officers, and the police used their batons to beat back protesters. . . . As night settled in, the streets in northern Tehran that recently had been the scene of

pre-election euphoria were lit by the flames of trash fires and blocked by tipped trash bins and at least one charred bus. Young men ran through the streets throwing paving stones at shop windows, and the police pursued them.

On the same day (June 13) the *Associated Press* similarly reported:

Opponents of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad clashed with police in the heart of Iran's capital Saturday, pelting them with rocks and setting fires in the worst unrest in Tehran in a decade. . . . The brazen and angry confrontations — including stunning scenes of masked rioters tangling with black-clad police — pushed the self-styled reformist movement closer to a possible moment of truth. . . . Young men hurled stones and bottles at anti-riot units and mocked Ahmadinejad as an illegitimate leader. . . . Thousands of protesters — mostly young men — roamed through Tehran looking for a fight with police and setting trash bins and tires ablaze. Pillars of black smoke rose among the mustard-colored apartment blocks and office buildings in central Tehran. In one side road, an empty bus was engulfed in flames. Police fought back with clubs, including mobile squads on motorcycles swinging truncheons.

“Thousands of protesters — mostly young men — roamed through Tehran looking for a fight with police. . . .” Does this sound peaceful to anyone?

And here is a CNN report, also on June 13, from Tehran: “In the aftermath of the vote, street protesters and riot police engaged in running battles, with stones thrown, garbage cans set on fire and people shouting 'death to the dictatorship.' . . . Later in the evening, an agitated and angry crowd emerged in Tehran's Moseni Square, with people breaking into shops, starting fires and tearing down signs.”

Two days later, June 15, *Time Magazine* had a similar report from Tehran:

Some of Tehran's main streets have been turned into urban battlegrounds. Groups of mostly young men have set large garbage bins on fire in the middle of streets, torn out street signs and fences, broken the windows and ATM machines of state banks and burnt at least five large buses in the middle of streets.

The June 15, 2009 clashes between demonstrators and the security forces around the Azadi square further escalated, claiming seven lives, the first election-related deaths. Reporting on the tragic confrontation, the *Associated Press* wrote:

Iran state radio reported Tuesday [June 16] that clashes in the Iranian capital the previous day left seven people dead during an 'unauthorized gathering' at a mass rally over alleged election fraud—the first official confirmation of deaths linked to the wave of protests and street battles after the elections. The report said the deaths occurred after protesters 'tried to attack a military location.' It gave no further details, but it was a clear reference to crowds who came under gunfire Monday after trying to storm a compound for volunteer militia linked to Iran's

powerful Revolutionary Guard. . . . The deaths Monday occurred on the edge of Tehran's Azadi Square. An Associated Press photographer saw gunmen, standing on a roof, opening fire on a group of demonstrators who tried to storm the militia compound.

Commenting on this dreadful shooting of the protestors by the members of the Basij militia, Phil Wilayto, author of *In Defense of Iran*, writes: "It's terrible that seven people died. But the Basij members were in a building set on fire by 'protesters,' who were trying to storm the building. What were they supposed to do?" [19].

These reports by some of the most established news media in the West makes it clear that, by resorting to illegal and vilolent methods of demonstration, the protestors did not leave government's security forces much choice to react violently. No other government would tolerate such methods of protest. Imagine for a moment that on the day after last November's presidential election in the United States John McCain's supporters, following his encouragement, challenged the elections results, took to the streets and began destroying public property, or attacking police stations. It goes without saying that the response of the US security forces would have been more violent and much swifter than that of Iran's. US security forces would certainly have not waited for three or four days (as did Iran's) to react; their reaction would have been immediate.

It must be pointed out that reports of violent demonstrators by the mainstream Western media came to a sudden halt after June 19, 2009. Why? Because on that day the US Congress, both the House and the Senate, passed resolutions that condemned the Iranian security forces' crackdown on demonstrators as unprovoked, thereby effectively characterizing the protests as peaceful. Shamelessly, the corporate media followed the official line through-and-through.

6. Concluding Remarks

One does not have to be a fan of Ahmadinejad to find his opponents' "green revolution" a dubious—perhaps disgraceful—project. Mr. Mousavi and/or his campaign architects seem to have run a dishonest campaign: pretending to rely on the ballot box to carry out their "reform" agenda but, then, disobeying the will of the majority when they did not garner the majority vote. As noted earlier, it is one thing to use the voters' dissatisfaction with the status quo to win an election. It is quite another thing, however, to abuse that dissatisfaction and the election process to defy the actual election results when those results turn out to be at variance with what you wishfully projected.

In the absence of irrefutable evidence, it would be unwise to make a judgment on whether Mr. Mousavi personally conspired with his campaign architects on the "green revolution" project, or whether he was led to sincerely believe he could not have lost the election. Likewise, short of concrete evidence, it would be imprudent to make a judgment on whether his campaign consciously collaborated with the external forces of "regime change" in Iran. Nor is the proof (or disproof) of such links germane to the primary

intention of this essay. The primary purpose of the essay has, instead, been to show that, regardless of external factors or Mr. Mousavi's personal proclivities, powerful economic interests, or influential social forces, behind his "green revolution" evolved within Iran's own socio-economic structure.

As it is increasingly becoming clear that the claim of "stolen election" was a hoax, Mr. Mousavi and his supporters seem to be quietly shying away from repeating that gigantic lie. Instead, they tend to play up the large number of protesters who supported his campaign and the subsequently heavy-handed crackdown on demonstrators as if these would prove that he did not or could not have lost the election. As a way of (quietly) departing from the claim of "stolen election," as if changing the subject, some of his supporters make arguments like this: "Don't you see the huge, frustrated and angry number of demonstrators? Doesn't this show how tired people are of this dictatorial regime? Who cares about the official account of the elections; they are inherently undemocratic in the theocratic Islamic Republic anyway? Don't you see how thirsty people are for change? Isn't this proof enough to get rid of Ahmadinejad's regime? And so on." Let us briefly examine these arguments.

To begin with, as great as the number of opposition demonstrators were they remained nonetheless a minority of the electorate. Pro-Ahmadinejad counter demonstrations, allowed only a few times, literally dwarfed those who demonstrated in support of Mousavi. (Critics of "color revolutions" point out that one of the strategies of the leaders of these revolutions to create chaos, confusion and instability has been to resort to violence and provoke counter demonstrations. Ahmadinejad's government seems to have avoided this trap by actively discouraging pro-government counter demonstrations.)

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the problem with Mr. Mousavi's campaign was not his giving voice to people's grievances, or trying to affect an agenda of positive change in Iran. Rather, it was his method or strategy of change that was problematic. As if the end justifies the means, his campaign seemed to have followed a less-than honest strategy to achieve its goal of removing Ahmadinejad from power. Mr. Mousavi accepted Iran's legal and institutional norms when he decided to run as a candidate for President. Indeed, he greatly benefitted from those legal and institutional procedures in running a very effective campaign. Somewhere along the way his campaign decided to disobey those guideline when they became convinced their candidate would lose (or had actually lost) the election. In trying to use the impressive energy of the remarkably galvanized supporters of Mr. Mousavi as a lever to illegally dislodge President Ahmadinejad, his campaign effectively betrayed the trust his supporters had placed in his candidacy.

Not only has the insidious project of "green revolution" paved the way for a lot of unnecessary death and destruction, it has also provided the imperial forces of "regime change" with additional excuses to re-double their brutal efforts of economic sanctions and military threats against Iran, thereby further aggravating the economic hardship and the living conditions of the Iranian people. Mr. Mousavi and his campaign architects simply cannot dodge responsibility for the dire consequences of their "green revolution."

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