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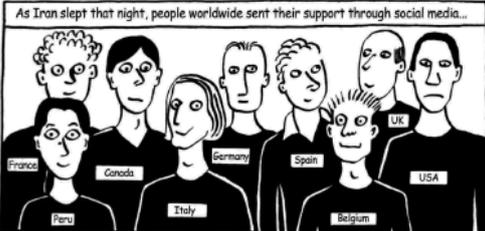
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IRAN'S NONVIOLENT REVOLUTION

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As Iran slept that night, people worldwide sent their support through social media...



...and by protesting in the streets of capitals around the world.



The next morning in Iran...

They're waiting

The military doesn't act...



...but the militias do, brutally.



Dozens of civilians are killed including a young girl named Neda...



Don't cry Neda. Your death will not be in vain...



**Support Iranians,
Spread the word.**

**Forward
This Message**

**Twitter, Facebook,
Email, Print,
Protest.**

All images were taken
from Marjane Satrapi's
inspirational novel
Persepolis

SpreadPersepolis@gmail.com

Iran's June 2009 presidential election and its aftermath have led to a revolutionary movement that is shaking the foundation of the Islamic Republic. The aftershocks of this political earthquake will likely to be felt throughout the entire region. By all accounts, it has already radically changed the course of Iran's modern history, if not the entire world.

How did a tightly managed and limited election evolved to a referendum on a regime that appeared so powerful and in control? How did a somber and indifferent public mood changed to an engaged and determined will for radical change? The nonviolent collective action that in only three weeks unraveled one of the most complicated and well organized repressive regimes of the Middle East surprised many of the foreign observers.

There were very few early signs in the election year. The first weeks of campaign season were remarkably boring and the opposition candidate, Mr Musavi, was arguably one of the least exciting political figures on the reformist scene. Many preferred more dynamic and adamant critics of the regime like Abdollah Nouri, the cleric who challenged the supreme leader directly few years ago. Mr. Musavi had

after all presided as a prime minister during a decade of war with Iraq and when thousands of political prisoners were executed in the prisons of the Islamic Republic. He posed as loyal to the regime and advocated a moderate reformist approach.

All that changed in the course of few short weeks. By the last days of the presidential campaign, waves of green colored shirts and flags were sweeping the country. Millions of young activists were pouring into the streets celebrating their pending victory and end of Ahmadinejad's era.

The last few days before the vote were marked with fierce debates that exposed the extent of corruption and dissatisfaction with the ruling elites. The government appeared to be losing control of the streets. The sudden explosion of the civil society forces with their infective enthusiasm excited even many of the foreign observers. Fareed Zakaria declared that Iran isn't a dictatorship¹. The veteran New York Times correspondent, Roger Cohen, claimed Iran's democracy is incomplete but vigorous to the point of unpredictability². He later would apologize for his error in judgment. Only Keyhan, the official propaganda arm of the Islamic Republic, had picked up

¹ Iran isn't a dictatorship, **Fareed Zakaria**, Newsweek, May 23, 2009

² Iran's democracy is incomplete but vigorous to the point of unpredictability. Roger Cohen, New York Times, June 10, 2009

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the ominous signs and was already on the offensive, accusing Musavi and his followers of organizing a “colored revolution”.

The backbone of Ahmadinejad’s administration, the Revolutionary Guards, had been fearful of a ‘velvet revolution’ for years. Their office of strategic studies had warned about a velvet revolution for nearly a decade. Since the 2005, the annual ritual of arresting a group of Iranian citizens and forcing them to confess to playing a role in a CIA induced velvet revolution had become routine.

But this time the state propaganda appeared to be late and ineffective. The stream of energetic and enthusiastic youth kept pouring into the streets. People from different classes and backgrounds had found a common ground: to vote Ahmadinejad out of the office. It had become clear to the regime's analysts that Mr Ahmadinejad would not win the required 50 per cent in the first round and would therefore have to compete against his main opponent in a second round, as required by the constitution.

A second round would have led to more campaigning and more street demonstrations, more young women singing farewell songs to the dictator. The Revolutionary Guards strategists

viewed a victory of a reformist candidate dangerous. Musavi’s victory would have released an explosive energy in the streets and the rate and extent of the ensuing reforms would have been unacceptable to the Revolutionary Guards. This immense pressure led the Interior Ministry, the body which was running the election and was managed by a former commander of the Revolutionary Guards, to its first strategic mistake: a preemptive strike to rig the vote and to announce a decisive victory for the incumbent Ahmadinejad. There were already many red flags for the forces of civil society that hinted at this outcome. The restriction placed on the observers and the setting up of more than 14,000 mobile electoral trucks that allowed an opportunity for alteration in transit were widely seen as an attempt to steal the election. The ministry also printed far more ballot papers than there were eligible voters and did not allow the ballots to be tabulated locally. Instead they were sent in to the ministry to be counted there. Finally, the results were announced only two hours after the vote, making no effort to hide the vote rigging operation.

On the eve of the election and before the results were officially announced, the Revolutionary Guards prepared for a military take over of the streets. The delegates from the office

of the supreme leader, the highest authority in the Islamic Republic of Iran, reached Mir Hossein Mousavi's residence around midnight on Election Day, Friday, June 12th. Mousavi knew he was not the supreme leader's favorite candidate, yet he expected nothing but good news. All day long the proceedings and monitors had reported a big win for him, a three-to-one victory resulting from the enthusiastic participation of a large number of young voters from densely populated urban centers. His nearest rival would have been another reformist candidate, Mehdi Karubi. But a 7 million to 8 million margin over his opponent meant he was a favorite to win the runoff.

But the men from the office of the supreme leader had other things on their mind. It was that odd combination of good-news-bad-news that provided most of the midnight irony. Surely they had come to congratulate him on his landslide victory. But they also carried a somber note from the supreme leader that it would not be in the best interest of the country for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to step aside. They informed Mousavi that the incumbent Ahmadinejad would be declared the victor, and that Mousavi was to fulfill his duties by abiding by the supreme leader's wish and accepting the new plan in the interest of national security. It is not

clear how long exactly it took Mousavi to make the most important decision of his political life. But the next fateful morning, he emerged defiant and uncompromising. He declared victory and demanded that the government respect the people's vote and that Ahmadinejad step aside.

Overnight, the Revolutionary Guard's command center had mobilized their military-security force in the streets of Tehran. On Saturday, the Basij and Ashoura battalions took control of all major streets and the decisive 'victory' was officially announced. The nation watched the reported results in a shock. It was difficult to believe that while 85 per cent of the electorate had voted, Ahmadinejad had received 24.5 million, with Mousavi in the distant second place with 13.2 million votes. Rigorous analysis of the result by Chatham House in a report entitled, "Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran's 2009 Presidential Election" confirmed the national suspicion. The researchers found a pattern of voting widely at odds from past Iranian elections, including a surge in support for Ahmadinejad in rural areas where conservative candidates were deeply unpopular in Iran's 1997, 2001, and 2005 elections. They also find that for Ahmadinejad's support to be legitimate, in a third of Iran's provinces he would have had to win over not only all

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of his former supporters, but all formerly centrist voters, all new voters, and “up to 44 percent of former reformist voters, despite a decade of conflict between these two groups.”

Regime’s strategy to put an end to street demonstrations failed miserably. Massive street protests in support of Mousavi broke out. It soon would become a daily occurrence. The Basij militia was quick to attack student dorms at Tehran University, reportedly killing and arresting students. Ahmadinejad made a public speech describing those who questioned the results as ‘dust and trash’. The nation responded with over two million people taking over the Azadi Square and adjacent streets in Tehran on Monday, June 15th, holding signs of “Where is my vote?” or singing slogans of “we are not dust and trash, this land is our land” and ‘Ahmadinejad, you could not see our votes but you could see the halo of light’.

All reports and eyewitness accounts of demonstrations, much of which was quickly posted on the facebook, show that it took only five days before the demands for recount and nullifying of the election results transformed into demands for regime change. The Basij militia began shooting into the protestors killing and wounding hundreds of young people. Other cities joined

Tehran with their own rallies and similar rallies were held in many provincial capitals, notably Isfahan and Shiraz. Shiraz witnessed some of the bloodiest scenes ever seen in Iran’s recent history including the atrocities committed during the 1979 revolution.

At first, news of the demonstrations, arrests and attacks, including photographs, were disseminated around the world. However, the regime soon implemented measures effectively shutting and slowing down electronic communications. For long periods of time, one of the few reliable modes of communication was through Twitter. Eventually, foreign journalists were told that their visas would not be renewed, and those who remained were forbidden from reporting from the street.

These events will have a colossal impact on Iran and subsequently the entire region. The origin of Iran’s non-violent revolution could be traced back to the aspirations of Iranian people in 1979, their quest for freedom and rights. But the radical transformation of this reform oriented struggle is rooted in the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s victory in June 2005 Presidential election. That victory began two important political developments inside Iran. First, a coalition of military-intelligence elites gradually took over all the key positions of power within the Iranian

government, thereby replacing the traditional theocratic structure of the clerical regime with a more conventional and militaristic authoritarianism³. Their rule coincided with raising oil prices and worsening of Iran's economy. A short study of urban poverty that appeared in July of 2008 in a research journal of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) shows that that poverty was high and on the rise during this period. The report claims that 14 million Iranians are living below the poverty line, in a country that suffers from an inflationary rate of about 30%, one of the highest in the world. Some scholars have questioned the significant rise in poverty, yet admit to an increase in the proportion of individuals in poverty, from 32.0% in 2005 to 33.9% in 2006, and for half-the-median from 17.4% to 18.7%, stating that these are not signs of increasing poverty but of a deteriorating distribution of income.⁴

In either case, the deteriorating economy and increasing pressure on the vulnerable social groups during the time of massive increase in the inflow of oil revenues and the resulting expansion of the economy shaped the basis of unpopularity of a President whose slogans focused on economic justice when he took the office.

Shortly after his election in 2005, budget laws were passed to permit

awarding of lucrative state contracts to Basij, Sepah and related companies. Sever limitations were placed on local councils and their elections⁵. Under Ahmadinejad, the government favored the guards by offering its companies no-bid contracts, especially in oil and natural-gas extraction, pipeline construction and large-scale infrastructure development. Khatam al-Anbia, a Revolutionary Guard firm, was awarded a \$1.3 billion contract in May 2006 to construct a 560-mile (900-kilometer) gas pipeline from Asalouyeh, in southern Iran, to Iranshahr near the Pakistani border. In June 2006, the same construction group won a \$2.3 billion contract to develop part of the South Pars offshore natural gas field⁶. It also got jobs potentially worth \$2 billion to expand Tehran's subway system, the IRNA news agency said. According to Rand report, "The IRGC's growing economic might has increased its sense of political privilege and entitlement."⁷

From laser eye surgery and construction to automobile manufacturing and real estate, the Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) extended its influence into virtually every sector of the Iranian market. Many observers including the writers of Rand report thought that "the commercialization of the IRGC has the potential to broaden the circle of its popular support by co-opting existing financial

³ Elliot Hen-Tov, Understanding Iran's New Authoritarianism, Washington Quarterly, 30:1, pp163-179. Winter 2006

⁴ Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, Has Poverty Increased in Iran Under Ahmadinejad?, The Brookings Institution, Aug 5, 2008.

⁵ Kian Tajbakhsh, Iran Under President Ahmadinejad, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, June 26, 2006

⁶ Iranian Revolutionary Guards Takeover Oil Market, RoozOnline, 07/3/06

⁷ Rand Report: The Rise of the Pasdaran, Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, 2008.

“The complete take over of economy by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards fractured a regime that was already filled with many political, cultural and economic conflicts”

elites into its constellation of subsidiary companies and subcontractors.” But contrary to that prediction, the complete take over of economy by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards fractured a regime that was already filled with many political, cultural and economic conflicts, beyond repair.

Second and equally important factor that led to the 2009 revolution was closing the doors on the reformist elements and rolling back the limited liberalization that had taken place under previous reformist administration of Khatami. The crushing of the reform movement closed off avenues for a peaceful evolution. By declaring a war on Iran’s civil society forces, the IRGC Coup alienated majority of population and significantly radicalized the nonviolent movement.

Shaken by daily rallies of a defiant population, the regime launched a massive crackdown, the full extent of which remains unknown. There are reports that at least 100 people have been killed in the clashes and more than 5000 civil society activists have been arrested. At least one Death Camp has been set up in Kahrizak, north of Tehran, fashioned after the Russian Filtration Camps in Chechnya. There are at least about 1000 detainees in a camp that can only hold a few hundred. There are several reports

of Typhoid outbreaks and lack of clean food and water in the camp, raising serious concerns about a pending wide spread humanitarian emergency.

Unless the international community reject the IRGC Coup’s legitimacy and put significant pressure on the Iranian government to respect the rights of their citizens, the situation will further deteriorate.

Europe can call on the government of Iran to take the following actions:

1. Provide information regarding the whereabouts and conditions of all political detainees since June 12th.
2. Release all detainees unconditionally and ensure that they have access to legal representation and a fair trial.
3. Stop all torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or any form of extrajudicial punishment in the Iran’s prisons.
4. Permit an independent investigation into the atrocities committed against Iran’s citizens since June 12th.
5. Take all measures to ensure full respect for the right to freedom of expression, including non-harassment of journalists.

6. Take all measures to assure the right to peaceful assembly, including ensuring that no further aggression by State or non-State agents is taken against participants in future protests.
7. Hold Iran's presidential election in accordance to international free and fair standards and allow international monitoring bodies to observe the election proceedings.



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