

The leadership quagmire in Iran

Written by Reza Molavi

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REZA MOLAVI, JAN 5 2010

The government of Mr. Ahmadinejad remains unwilling to acknowledge any culpability in the destruction of any property or the killing of more than ten or so protestors in the last few days of mourning processions, including the shooting of one of the opposition leader's nephew. "The killing of Musavi's nephew in the Ashura incidents is being investigated and the result will be announced soon," Tehran police chief Azizollah Rajabzadeh told the ILNA news agency. The official line is that anti-regime terrorists carried out the killings in order to discredit the regime.

Although the course of future events in Iran is quite unpredictable, certain dates are fixed in the calendar. The opposition forces have taken advantage of pre-set days, like Jerusalem Day, Students' Day, and Ashura to stage their largest recent protests. In 1978, the rhythm of these pre-set days allowed the opposing forces both to organize and to rest up in between. January 16 marks the day that the Shah fled in 1979, The fortieth day of mourning (arba'een) for Ayatollah Montazeri will be January 29, while the arba'een for the death of Imam Hussein and for those slain on the 27th of December 2009, will fall on 5th February 2010. Another important fixture is the 11th to 21st of February 2010 which falls in the middle of the Revolution's celebration of the Ten Days of Dawn, which commemorates the tumultuous events leading up to Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran.

Today, the stated aim of former presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi and other key reformists in Iran is not to overthrow the Islamic system set up in 1979, which they themselves helped build. Instead, they seek to reverse what they say was a fraudulent election, and make pro-democracy reforms within the existing system. Not necessarily because they are true believers of democratisation, but to ensure the staying power and the preservation of the regime which brought them into prominence thirty years ago.

Protests by those referred to as reformists, took a bloody turn last week, with at least 8 dead by Monday. Anti government demonstrators attacked police with stones for the first time and also burned a jeep, according to reports coming out of the country. A spokesman for Mr. Mousavi alleged that Seyed Ali Mousavi's killing was a targeted assassination. He said he was shot in the heart.

I feel the important ingredients in making the Iranian revolution successful some thirty years ago was also the mass protests, with a crippling inflation compounded by a weak economy, a regime that had lost touch with its people and seemed heavily dependent on foreigners, a charismatic leader with a solid base behind him in the lower classes, and, decisively, a fracturing military and security apparatus. Iran of today seems to possess all these attributes except a strong and charismatic leader and a fractured military and security apparatus. Furthermore, there are no signs of unrest spreading throughout the sixty thousand plus villages throughout Iran.

Is history repeating itself? It is plain that the regime's opposition is heavily, though not exclusively, middle class in its origins. And it is largely the young who are in the streets of the main population centres of Iran. It is also clear that the regime leadership appears to have neither the wisdom nor flexibility to respond to its grave challenge. They are obsessed with fear of foreign enemies. When matters grow worse, they apply heavier doses of the same prescription that was dished out by the Pahlavi regime, in the last days of their reign.

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