



February 21, 2004

## Analysis on Iran's elections

---

Q - We are joined now by Ali Safavi, President of Washington Consulting Firm Near East Policy Research. It's good to have you join us. Welcome.

First off, looking at an article you wrote the mullahcracy is loathed in Iran, referring to the rule of the mullahs in the country. Is that enough to energize the youth and perhaps look at revolution and counter-revolution?

**Safavi:** First of all, good morning, it's a pleasure to be on your show. Indeed, as I said in my op-ed in the New York Times, the overwhelming majority of the Iranian people detest this regime. In fact, a government sponsored survey that was conducted in August 2002 indicated that some 95% of the Iranian population wants a regime change. And if you look at the demonstrations and protests across the country over the past year or so you will recognize that the underlying theme of all the protests has been the demand for a UN supervised referendum and regime change and the fact that the vast majority of Iranians boycotted the election sham yesterday is indicative that people want a fundamental change.

Q: It is one thing to say that people want fundamental change and that the people are fed up, but the reality however is that the conservatives were able to disqualify a lot of reformists from standing as candidates in the elections. We know the people have been hanged and continually harassed, a lot of things. This has been going on. However, we haven't seen a great energizing of the populace in order to do something about that dissatisfaction. Why is that and does it really trouble you?

**Safavi:** I think the fact is that you have to remember you are dealing with a really repressive regime. Just in the beginning of this year, since January, some 40 people have been hanged. Floggings, arrests, amputations of limbs continue in Iran all across the country. I think quite frankly that one very important way to bring about change in Iran is for the international community to look at the organized resistance to this regime.

Obviously, the Iranian youth are fed up. As you know, 75% of the country's population is below the age of 30. But that opposition by the Iranian youth has to be in a sense galvanized by lending support to the call for UN referendum for regime change and for support for the Iranian opposition movement.

Of course, as you know the call for a boycott was first announced by the leader of the Resistance, Maryam Rajavi back in November of this year. And in fact, her call for a regime change referendum has gained international support, some 750 members of parliament in 11 different countries across the world announced that they support such a call. So I think it will need not only efforts by the people of Iran but by the international community to bring about what is needed to be done. Particularly, given the fact that the Iranian regime's secret nuclear program is continuing and its efforts to export terrorism continues, its efforts to meddle in Iraq continue...

Q - As you say the international community needs to be more vocal in their objections and their interventions in what's going on in Iran. You also point out in your Op-Ed piece that as far as you can see many of the conservatives who are in leadership in Iran will not stand for that. So, subsequently, a number of people have been arrested.

In light of all of that, what happens to people like Mohammad Khatami whom you say his rhetoric has simply served to provide cover for European trade. What happens to him? What happens to other reformists within parliament right now, perhaps those more radical who have boycotted these elections?

**Safavi** – Obviously, as you know these people have (served) the mullahs in the past quarter century. They have reached the end of the road. Quite frankly, I think Khatami's capitulation to the Supreme Leader despite his early pledge that he would not stand for an unfair and undemocratic election has totally discredited him and I think people in Iran are now looking for something beyond the so-called reformers. I think they are looking for fundamental change.

I think there is a current in Iran today that if cultivated by the international community, I think it would bring about that change. Remember six months before the Shah was overthrown, there was no sign what so ever that his regime will be toppled.

Q – So in effect, you are calling for a revolution. You're suggesting the international community to support those who are anti-mullahs, anti-conservatives, to bring about change. In other words, a revolution?

**Safavi** – Indeed, I think the only peaceful means to bring about change is through a UN supervised referendum because the elections in Iran under the current system are a sham, you saw it yourself this Friday based on confidential reports from the Iranian Interior Ministry, that I had access to, some were between 2.5 to 3 million people voted yesterday that is basically 6% of eligible voters in Iran. So quite frankly, this regime is illegitimate, people don't want this. So I think that instead of engaging Iran, it is high time that the international community to side with the demands of the Iranian people.

In the United States, the United States Senate adopted a resolution that basically called for referendum on regime change; I think the people of Iran want that.

So, if you want to have peaceful change in that country, I think it has to be through internationally monitored referendum in that country. Otherwise we are going to be in for serious trouble because Khamenei and the hardliners are going to consolidate their position. They are going to continue the suppression within the country, continue their meddling in the Internal affairs in Iraq and in fact, they have become so brazen that they have called for the extradition of the opposition to Tehran.

I think, if anything, the international community should once and for all demonstrate zero tolerance for the Iranian regime and basically side with the demands of the people in Iran.

Q – Ali Safavi, I'm afraid we have run out of time. We are going to have to leave it there but once again, thank you for joining us.

Safavi – Thank you.