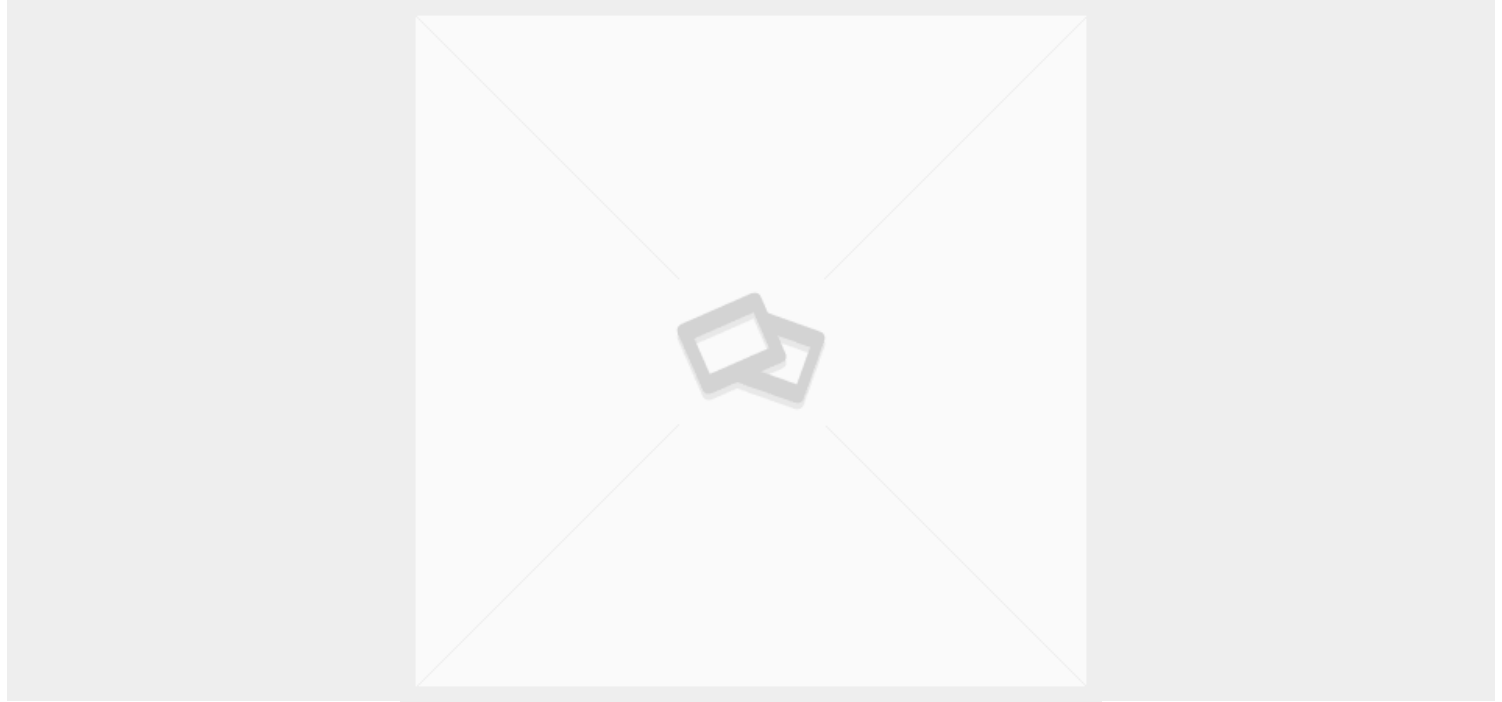


WEATHERING THE STORM: THE LESSONS FROM THE UNREST IN IRAN

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Category: [Opinions](#)



By Richard Giragosian, Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS), [ArmeniaNow](#)
, 19 June 2009

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The neighbouring Arab countries in the region are following the events in Iran with particular interest. Will the Iranian experience resonate? See Olivia Ward's article which concludes this section.
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For much of this past week, Armenia's southern neighbor Iran has been gripped by a powerful, and at times, even violent post-election crisis. While the past several days have seen the largest anti-government demonstrations since the 1979 Iranian revolution, with hundreds of thousands of Iranian citizens protesting a disputed presidential election, the scale and scope of these protests have also revealed a set of even deeper and more serious economic discontent.

The post-election unrest poses the most serious challenge to the Iranian authorities since they came to power in the wake of the Iranian revolution twenty years ago. In addition, the current wave of unrest is largely directed against the ruling elite, although it is not, at least yet, targeting the system itself.

Of course, the current unrest in Iran was triggered by political developments - namely, by the 12 June presidential election, in which incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared the official winner over his leading rival, former Iranian Prime Minister Hussein Mousavi. But the deeper cause of the unrest is much more than a political dispute, but stems from the broader context of the "economics of change" within Iran.

The "economics of change"

Within this context there is also a class-based confrontation, with much of the younger and more recently empowered

Iranian middle class aspiring for real change, while the older, much more conservative ruling "clerical elite" merely seek to sustain the status quo. This division, between those hungry for change and those simply struggling to hold on to power, also reflects an economic competition.

For the Iranian middle class, the imperative is for Iran to forge a new economic future, moving beyond international isolation and state-imposed sanctions. Their demands are based on more than just hopes for a better economic future, however, but also reflect more practical demands over corruption, social restrictions, rising inflation, declining wages and an overall lack of jobs. Such economic demands, naturally shared by university students throughout Iran, have only swelled the ranks of the middle class demonstrators. And it is a formidable force, empowered by years of unmet promises and frustrated expectations, and also more politically assertive, better educated and more socially sophisticated than its rivals.

Notably, the demographics of the protests reveal an interesting generational aspect—whereby the majority of opposition demonstrators have no real memory of Iran before the 1979 revolution. This youth factor not only infers a much bolder, more courageous and even idealistic element to the anti-establishment protestors, but also implies a more difficult challenge to resolve the demands and expectations of a new generation of Iranians who have matured only within the confines of years of isolation and economic disengagement defined by the Islamic Republic of Iran's world view.

On the opposing side, in open support for President Ahmadinejad, the ruling "clerical elite" is backed by a combination

of more pious or religious-minded Iranians and the rural population. For these people, representing the most conservative elements of Iranian society, their future is rooted more in the past than the present, and is certainly not seeking any degree of change. This ruling elite, and the small wealthy upper class that supports it, is a product of a system that has become defined by the accumulation

of wealth and power in the years after the revolution. Thus, for this group, by its very nature, any change or deviation from the status quo is seen as a threat to the system, to the state and, most importantly, a threat to their own personal power and wealth. And it is this underlying economic division, which has only driven and exacerbated the political unrest and mounting instability that offers several important "lessons," and even warnings, for Armenia.

Lessons for Armenia

First, Iranians are now waging a struggle for the very future of Iran, set off by a disputed presidential election. In this way, Iran is now facing its own March 1st post-election crisis, similar to the events in Armenia last year. Both crises led to the tragic deaths of civilian demonstrators. Both episodes featured the use, and misuse, of force, with police and security forces applying an excessive and repressive response to the demonstrations.

In Armenia's case, the March 2008 crisis remains unresolved to date, as the authorities have been unable or unwilling to fully and fairly investigate the events of March 2008. Further, the Armenian case is also plagued by a failure to adequately resolve the underlying tension and demands of that crisis.

The second lesson for Armenia from the current crisis in Iran is the fact that the election revealed that very serious domestic contradictions quickly developed into a highly volatile and explosive internal situation that no ideology, no matter how powerful, could contain. For the Armenian authorities, this lesson also includes a warning: that there can be no political panacea or substitute for not addressing concrete socio-economic problems. And with Iran, it is also clear that the recent crisis has shown that no country in this modern world can remain truly isolated.

But it is the third lesson from Iran, the "economics of change" as a driving force behind this tension that is even more worrisome for Armenia. In both cases, young Iranians and Armenians share the same hopes, for a brighter future, for economic opportunities, and for a voice in how their country is governed.

For both countries, there is no return to the pre-crisis status quo. The political and economic demands for change remain unmet. But to continue to ignore these basic demands and natural expectations, creates a real risk of only prolonging the crisis, and most dangerously, merely fuels the fire of discontent.

Are the Iranian Protests Another US Orchestrated "Color Revolution?"

Is This the Culmination of Two Years of Destabilization? [Global Research.ca](https://www.globalresearch.ca)

By Paul Craig Roberts

A number of commentators have expressed their idealistic belief in the purity of Mousavi, Montazeri,

and the westernized youth of Terhan. The CIA destabilization plan, announced two years ago (see below) has somehow not contaminated unfolding events.

The claim is made that Ahmadinejad stole the election, because the outcome was declared too soon after the polls closed for all the votes to have been counted. However, Mousavi declared his victory several hours before the polls closed. This is classic CIA destabilization designed to discredit a contrary outcome. It forces an early declaration of the vote. The longer the time interval between the preemptive declaration of victory and the release of the vote tally, the longer Mousavi has to create the impression that the authorities are using the time to fix the vote. It is amazing that people don't see through this trick.

As for the grand ayatollah Montazeri's charge that the election was stolen, he was the initial choice to succeed Khomeini, but lost out to the current Supreme Leader. He sees in the protests an opportunity to settle the score with Khamenei. Montazeri has the incentive to challenge the election whether or not he is being manipulated by the CIA, which has a successful history of manipulating disgruntled politicians.

There is a power struggle among the ayatollahs. Many are aligned against Ahmadinejad because he accuses them of corruption, thus playing to the Iranian countryside where Iranians believe the ayatollahs' lifestyles indicate an excess of power and money. In my opinion, Ahmadinejad's attack on the ayatollahs is opportunistic. However, it does make it odd for his American detractors to say he is a conservative reactionary lined up with the ayatollahs.

Commentators are "explaining" the Iran elections based on their own illusions, delusions, emotions, and vested interests. Whether or not the poll results predicting Ahmadinejad's win are sound, there is, so far, no evidence beyond surmise that the election was stolen. However, there are credible reports that the CIA has been working for two years to destabilize the Iranian government.

On May 23, 2007, Brian Ross and Richard Esposito reported on ABC News: "The CIA has received secret presidential approval to mount a covert "black" operation to destabilize the Iranian government, current and former officials in the intelligence community tell ABC News."

On May 27, 2007, the London Telegraph independently reported: "Mr. Bush has signed an official document endorsing CIA plans for a propaganda and disinformation campaign intended to destabilize, and eventually topple, the theocratic rule of the mullahs."

A few days previously, the Telegraph reported on May 16, 2007, that Bush administration neocon warmonger John Bolton told the Telegraph that a US military attack on Iran would "be a 'last option' after economic sanctions and attempts to foment a popular revolution had failed."

On June 29, 2008, Seymour Hersh reported in the New Yorker: "Late last year, Congress agreed to a request from President Bush to fund a major escalation of covert operations against Iran, according to current and former military, intelligence, and congressional sources. These operations, for which

the President sought up to four hundred million dollars, were described in a Presidential Finding signed by Bush, and are designed to destabilize the country's religious leadership."

The protests in Tehran no doubt have many sincere participants. The protests also have the hallmarks of the CIA orchestrated protests in Georgia and Ukraine. It requires total blindness not to see this.

Daniel McAdams has made some telling points. For example, neoconservative Kenneth Timmerman wrote the day before the election that "there's talk of a 'green revolution' in Tehran." How would Timmerman know that unless it was an orchestrated plan? 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? This looks like definite evidence that the US is involved in the election protests.

Timmerman goes on to write that "the National Endowment for Democracy has spent millions of dollars promoting 'color' revolutions . . . Some of that money appears to have made it into the hands of pro-Mousavi groups, who have ties to non-governmental organizations outside Iran that the National Endowment for Democracy funds." Timmerman's own neocon Foundation for Democracy is "a private, non-profit organization established in 1995 with grants from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), to promote democracy and internationally-recognized standards of human rights in Iran."

Voters' rebellion highlights Iran's divide with Arab world

By Olivia Ward, Foreign Affairs Reporter, The Toronto Star Jun 29, 2009

When the Berlin Wall fell to cheering crowds in 1989, East Germany's neighbours saw their chance to kick free of the stifling Soviet system, and communism quickly crumbled.

So it's not surprising that the Arab world has been silent on the turbulent protests that took place in Iran in the past week – demonstrations that have foundered as the government crackdown intensified.

If the protesters had won, and a new election dislodged hardline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Arab countries fearful of Iran's pumped-up progress across the Middle East might in some ways have rested easier.

But the "green revolution," however short-lived, means sleepless nights for Arab leaders worrying about its effect on their own restive masses, whose democratic tendencies have been firmly held in check.

"It's not surprising that the Arab countries have kept quiet," says Marina Ottaway, director of the Middle East program for the Washington-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "They would love to see Iran humiliated and Ahmadinejad gone. But they are also confronting the same problem as Iran."

Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, which ousted regional supremo Saddam Hussein, the balance of power has changed significantly in the Mideast, with the Arab states tipping downward as Iran's influence rose. Ahmadinejad's refusal to give up a nuclear program that could make Iran a nuclear weapons state was also cause for alarm.

"Iran has emerged as the great power," says Vali Nasr, author of *The Shia Revival*. "All the (recent) wars and changes have strengthened it in the region."

After Saddam's 2003 defeat, and Israel's ill-fated 2006 war against Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran has spread its influence and control into traditionally Arab areas. "The glass is half full for Iran, half empty for the Arabs," Nasr told bigthink.com.

Iran is also a Farsi-speaking Shiite country, with religious and cultural differences from the mainly Sunni Arab states, which have some sizeable Shiite populations of their own. The split has been widened by American support for Arab states, and the denunciation of Iran by former president George W. Bush.

But Iran's voters' rebellion has also highlighted its divide with the Arab world. In Egypt, where dissidents are arrested, beaten and jailed, public protest is severely limited. In Syria it is rare. And wealthy Saudi Arabia routinely represses suspected opponents.

Although there is widespread discontent below the surface in many parts of the Arab world, there is also cynicism about the political process, and a feeling of powerlessness.

"There's a dramatic decrease in the level of participation in elections," says Ottaway.

"The most dramatic example was in Morocco's parliamentary elections in 2007. Not only was there a very low turnout, but one-third of the ballots were deliberately spoiled."

And she adds, Bush's pressure on Arab leaders to introduce democratic reforms resulted only in window dressing that failed to accomplish its goal.

"They assumed they could buy off the population and win brownie points while maintaining the status quo," she said. "But now these countries are beginning to realize there's no such thing as half-democracy. They would only have to become more repressive."

