



## **Time for Regime Change in Iran**

*by Hedayat Mostowfi*

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### **The road map to democracy in Iraq passes through Tehran and not the other way around.**

After two decades of pursuing the policy of critical dialogue, the international community has exhausted all diplomatic channels to deal with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The time has come to make a strategic decision about the Iranian regime. Given that any hope of democratic change in Iran within the regime itself turned out to be a mirage, picking business over human rights can no longer be justified. Engaging Tehran has only prolonged the mullahs' grip on power.

The Iranians' boycott of the parliamentary election farce last February made it palpably clear that the clerics lack any legitimacy at home. As the leading state sponsor of terrorism, the prospects of a nuclear armed regime should sound the alarm bells in Western capitals.

International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors in Iran recently discovered a blueprint of a much more sophisticated centrifuge for uranium enrichment. They have also found traces of plutonium isotope, which is used in making nuclear weapons.

The *Los Angeles Times* on March 27, 2004, reported that "Iran set up a committee late last year to coordinate the concealment efforts after international inspectors uncovered evidence that the Islamic Republic had tried to hide aspects of its nuclear program, including secret research on advanced centrifuges that can produce weapons-grade uranium, according to the diplomats..... The committee's most pressing tasks include trying to hide nuclear evidence at nearly 300 locations around the country."

According to the Iranian opposition, 2005 is the year that Iran will

have enough material to make a nuclear weapon. The Iranian opposition was responsible for disclosing Iran's uranium enrichment facilities in Natanz for the first time. Ironically, were it not for the revelations of this group about Tehran's extensive secret nuclear program, the world would not have known what it knows today about the advanced nuclear weapons program in that country.

Each year, Tehran funnels millions of dollars to Islamic fundamentalist groups who simply murder civilians and innocent people.

The U.S appointed civil administrator of Iraq, Ambassador Paul Bremer, has expressed his grave concerns about Iran's interference in Iraq. In a letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, Senator Norm Coleman (R-MN) expressed his deep concerns about the Iranian interference in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Iran's mullahs are bent on preventing a stable and democratic Iraq from taking shape. In the aftermath of the war in Iraq, Tehran has dispatched thousands of its well-trained agents to that country to undermine the efforts of the coalition forces to restore calm and security in Iraq.

With the heavy US military presence in the west and the east, Tehran is feeling the pressure. The State Department, a longtime proponent of conciliation with Tehran, has failed to use that presence as leverage and get tough on Iran. In many ways, it has been co-opted by the ever-shrewd Europeans, who only look after their short-term business interests.

In the run-up to the Iranian parliamentary elections, the United State Senate passed a resolution drafted by Senator Sam Brownback and his colleagues -- Senators Ron Wyden, Norm Coleman, Evan Bayh, Jon Kyl, Mary Landreiu -- condemning the charade and endorsing a democratic referendum in Iran. In his message, Senator Brownback added: "By their defiance and despite a tremendous price so far, the Iranian people have rejected hollow promises of reform. Their message to us is that Iran's ruling theocracy can not be reformed from within and that instead of engaging Iran's so-called moderates or any other faction, we must engage the Iranian people and their democratic opposition by fully supporting the call for an internationally monitored referendum for democratic change to determine the fate of the fundamentalist

regime in Iran. There is hope for internal change by relying on the organized opposition, where there was none in Iraq or Afghanistan."

Some 750 parliament deputies from nearly a dozen countries in Europe have also backed the call for a United Nations-supervised regime change referendum.

Certainly, as much as a free, democratic and secular government in Iran would discourage the fundamentalist elements in Iraq, it would inspire the democratic forces in that country. The road map to democracy in Iraq passes through Tehran and not the other way around. The U.S. could help its own cause by supporting the democratic opposition to Tehran and the call for a referendum in Iran.

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