

The Quest for Democracy in an Islamic Style Fascist Dictatorship

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The Islamic Republic presidential election, scheduled for June 12, 2009, has brought a new life to political activity in Iran. Popular elections' legitimacy for the government became a well respected tradition since the 1905 Constitutional Revolution; although most of the times since then they were a façade for dictatorial regimes. For a peculiar internal structure of Shiite branch of Islam, Shiite authorities keep their independent from the most revered or powerful; in short, there is no firm hierarchy in Shi.ism. Since Islamic Republic is a new form of Shi.ism authority imposed universally, its elections manifest internal struggle of Shiites elite's independence and power backed by mass followers. At the same time enormous well educated middle class Iranians adhered to democracy, freedom, and human rights consider the Presidential and Majles (House of Representatives) elections their chance to gain executives and legislatives political power. As a result of Islamic Republic formation, and its backward nature, and brutal dictatorship, the political forces such as Islamist, Mossaddeghist's nationalist, and the whole spectrum of Iranian leftists which supported such a disastrous revolution lost their intellectual hold over Iranian politics which they had since contemporary Iran's modern era.

The traditionally and politically agitated Iran's universities have produced a new crop of political activists dedicated to democracy, freedom, and human rights. These were the same political activist who engineered the success of upset election's result of 1997, eighteen years after dark years of Islamic revolution, by supporting Mohammad Khatemi for presidency of Islamic republic. The success of these freedom fighters demonstrated their tremendous influence which they have among expanding urban population especially city's middle class. Although, the Khatemi administration could not live up to his voters and their inspirers expectations, but during following years these political activists formatted a more comprehensive, disillusioned, and developed political ideology; during the last twelve years this political ideology and their adherents were further refined. The three presidential, several Majles, and Tehran's city council elections (Mayors of Tehran and other cities are not elected but they, shamelessly, are appointed a good cause for democratic struggle) determined clearly the obstacles of fair and democratic elections, and in case of victory of a reformist the required tactics and strategy for combating dictatorial entrenched and dominance forces' obstructions.

The student organizations were evolved and coordinated nationally, and they are present in every province which has local university with committed cadres. The oldest and drastically changed student organization, which has been formed during Islamic regime, is known as "The Office of Firming unity". The Office of Firming Unity (OFU) published its comprehensive and lengthy manifest for presidential and Majles elections in five sections. In this political document the student movement reveals its insights, arguments, positions, and directions for the students' participation in the elections. As an opposing political force which instigates fundamental political changes in a dictatorial regime, it has chosen its language and vocabulary with a great deal of care and caution in this political manifest. The OFU clearly states its aspiration which is democracy, freedom, justice, and human rights. And it declares, "OFU is in these elections to promote and establish those cherished values".

The OFU acknowledges that it has no illusion for the extent of change which could be brought about in case of victory of candidates of reformist and pro-change; it believes the reforms in short time will be limited and for foreseeable long term will not be drastic. Furthermore, the student organization argues that the axis of reform is the election. Although, it is well aware of elections unfair screening of candidates and ballot stuffing, but still encourages the students participation in this election, contrary to last election which student organizations boycotted. The OFU hypothesizes that the political environment

either is in expansion or contraction, which depends on regime's tolerance for extend of political freedom or imposition of suppression; it continues, in the political environ of contraction general public political activity subsides while in a political environ of expansion general public political activity spikes. It concludes that since at this time we are in political contraction environment the election's boycott because of its undemocratic nature and hopelessness of its fairness is not a prudent choice. Furthermore, they argue the easing of foreign pressure on the Islamic republic regional behavior leaves them more vulnerable. The OFU with these arguments establishes the necessity of students' participation and promotion in the coming elections.

Then the OFU concentrates on the two crucial elements of elections which are the reformist candidates and the integrity of the elections. These two elements become the cornel of furthering student organizations struggle for democracy, freedom, justice, and human rights. To combat council of guardians (shoraya negahban) which screens candidates and disqualifies reformist and democrats at will and to safe guard election's integrity, OFU suggests a democratic front consisting of reformist inside regime and pro-change forces outside regime. The reason for this collaboration is the reformist lack of popularity for steering up a social movement, and the OFU's ability for its trustful credential to organize vast urban social movement. The firm belief among opposing forces of the regime is that without great social movement and mass voters turn out the reformist can't win these elections. The conclusion of this strategy is that dictatorial element of Islamic Republic regime will retreat when they face noticeable urban social movement; because considerable number of shi.ite establishment leaders will change side when confronted with overwhelming number of people. There is a critical mass of popular support necessary for the regime to survive and when it becomes short of that critical popular mass it will collapse; and that is when the regime chooses retreat rather than collapse.

The OFU struggles for civil society and believes Iran must have a reformist government to facilitate achieving that goal. The current politically oppressive government forced student organizations to complete defensive postures; this experience convinced them for necessity of a reformist government. At the beginning of the election campaign OFU declared its candidate for the presidency. But since so far OFU could not convince its choice to register himself formally as a candidate and take on the regime, it supports claimed reformers who are willing to take on current president re-election.

The OFU declares its commitment to peaceful political activities and its past activities confirms that; it also chooses to be democrat and promotes civil society. With the original Islamic revolutionaries still in charge of Islamic Republic it is hard to imagine democratic political opening. The student political activists are not willing to declare war perhaps because they have had witnessed the destiny of those who did which was execution, jail, and exile. Their strategy seems to fit the circumstances for survival and continuity. For Iran what is historically outstanding is the fundamental overall and transformation of Iranians political ideology which OFU represents.

The student organizations and OFU have nationally well known political leadership who can be candidates for presidency and Majles' deputies' election and take on regime directly. Obviously these candidates participation as the electable candidates will officially be denied; but this could be the desired cause for mass social movement or a limited one. In any case adherent of democracy and civil society achieve further national political recognition without attaching themselves to mullahs who generally are progressing far slower than urban middle class representatives. What is absolutely important is the advancement and continuity of political organizations which are committed to democracy, freedom, justice, and human rights.

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