

How do political forces are positioning themselves as the Islamic Republic's presidential election gets closer?

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With less than a month to Presidential election the political landscape is getting more complicated. The student organizations could not get their choice to become candidate for election, and they are now considering endorsing another reformist candidate. The reformist political activists, other than the goal of removing Ahmadinejad from office, condition their support for the reformist candidates to their specific demands. The interesting developments in this election are the formation of a few new voting blocs. Meaning, since none religious political entities can't organize freely in a political party, they declare unity for the specific political or social wish list as a voting bloc for the candidate who is prepared to accept them on his presidential agenda. The reformist has two candidates and fundamentalist or committed Khomeinist other than the current president has one more candidate.

It seems cleric Mehdi Karroubi, the first person who nominated himself for the presidency and founded his party, is poised to become the champion of reformist. Although, he is not describing his presidential agenda as the fundamental change, his political reformist program is closely similar to the student organization of Office of Firming Unity "OFU". Mr. Karroubi in his third presidential campaign political proclamation explained his political goals and must do reforms. Overall he intends to dismantle the Islamic Republic dictatorial structure. In his opening statement he stresses on law and order which must be updated to the necessity of the modern time and lack of that as the major problem for Islamic Republic. He emphasizes rule of law and explains as much as law requires respect of people, it also demands obedience of authorities in its letter; he continues, in recent years (Ahmadinejad's administration) lawlessness among authorities were rampant, and he intends to restore the Iranians' citizenship rights. Mr. Karroubi opposes the Council of Guardians who arbitrarily disqualifies and hand picks presidential candidates, and he considers that as a threat to the survival of the regime and believes its function must be modified.

In short, he promotes fair and just elections so it could be monitored by international observers without any concern; freedom of press in all forms including private TV cable channels and internet sites; respect for ethnic minority rights and implementation of Islamic Republic constitutional clause for the minority; enabling provincial local governments to manage their own internal affairs; an end to political terror in the universities which targets students and teaching staff; modernization of family law and establishment of equal rights for women; suspension of torture during investigation and restoring prisoners' rights and an end to children execution; encouraging formation of political parties, social and professional association as an critics and people's watch dog of government authorities. Mr. Karroubi thinks some of the reforms could be done through the Majles and others through constitutional changes; he also intends to form a commission for the implementation of the constitution. It seems Mr. Karroubi raised the political change and reform's flag.

The news release of former student organization, known as the Organization of Educated Muslim Iranians or Periods of Firming Unity "PFU" which is closely associated with "OFU", after its choice for presidential election definitely dropped out, explains its revised approach to the election. The PFU reiterates its firm belief that the election will not be free and fair, and it considers political, social and economic policies of the government disastrous for the last four years. The PFU laments for the lost

opportunity of Nori's nomination for change and reform. Although, according to the reported discussions among reformist, Nori demanded majority of reformers support in advance and in case of its disqualification by Council of Guardians boycott of the election. Obviously, this kind of expectation from former Khatemi supporters who feared more than supreme leader's camp from Islamist political schism was farfetched. Furthermore, the election's manipulation undermines natural selection, and the equation must have been reversed meaning after mass general public support the reformist would join the movement. However, the PFU keeps its eyes on presidential office by engaging the two candidates still in the race.

The PFU announces its intent to engage in a discussion with the two reformist candidates with the aim to encourage them to clarifying their agenda for the people and the PFU organization, so the PFU can endorse or criticize the candidates. The PFU stresses its concern for a clearly stated strategy of the reformers candidates rather than their promises and political postures. Mean while OFU had a meeting with Mr. Karroubi and his chief of election committee, the former Tehran's mayor and a practical capable administer who was jailed and humiliated by supreme leader's (Faghih) supporters. Also, the PFU asked from candidates to declare their position for the United Nation convention's declaration for discrimination against women, and it demanded with lengthy convincing reasoning to reverse the legality of polygamy because it degrades women's integrity.

"The Collaborative Committee of Women's Movement for their Expectations Assertion to the Election" is a recently formed voting entity. This is the widest possible voting bloc which literally encompasses half of Iran's population who are women. The meeting of these women struggling for equal rights with men was consisted of who is who of women's movement in Iran, included Islamist women who were former Islamic Republic's Majles deputies. Their demands are very simple but far reaching: first, Iran must join the UN convention for removal of any discrimination against women like other two hundred nations signatory; second, rewriting all of the laws which discriminate against women. They consider their movement collective, civil, and peaceful, and they address their demands to whoever is elected as the president. The movement claims it is not interfering or telling people how to vote, but this message will not be missed by candidates as well as voters. Since the women are the majority of university students and considering the overwhelming number of women in the major cities are educated, and also they are subject of terror for their appearance daily by Islamo fascist, the impact of their votes for a candidate must be decisive.

For the first time the lengthy and wordy "Liberals' Manifest" posted on the student's organization site. This manifest which roughly represents a social democrat ideology with pro-private enterprise conviction looks more like new voting bloc. The manifest begins with condemnation of leftist political ideology domination on the contemporary Iran's history and its disastrous consequences. Overall as the concluding paragraph points out this manifest is the beginning of construction of theoretical views for a liberal democrat party. The manifest political perspective is a firm belief in democracy, the government which voted to power with the free and fair vote of people, separation of government from religion and politics, acceptance of Iran's ethnic diversity as its strength rather than weakness. The manifest considers liberal governments of the west as a model to emulate and as a friend. The economy which this manifest promotes is outright capitalism and pro-business, and it also believes government must distribute wealth fairly not to confiscate. It contemplate Iran's government ownership of natural resources and major industrial enterprises enabled the government to be as dictatorial as it wishes; so the manifest concludes

the liberal regime for its financial needs must rely on taxation from businesses and people rather than running industrial enterprises. The social views of the manifest fundamentally supports human rights, women equal rights with men, academic respect and freedom, freedom and equal rights of religion without official religion for the country, and any other liberal idea one can imagine. These kinds of intellectual political views prior to national experience of Islamic regime would have been crushed by nationalist and leftist. The liberals' vote for the reformist candidates in the cities will be very important.

In the beginning of the election campaign, the reformists associated with former president Khatemi convinced him to throw his turban into the ring for the election race. Khatemi before nominating himself said either him or Mr. Mirhosain Mosavi will be reformist candidate. But he dropped out a few months after he announced his candidacy, and left Mr. Mosavi as the Khatemi's era reformist candidate, once defeated by Ahmadinejad. Mr. Mosavi was the former Prime Minister during the war with Iraq and mass execution of opponents with Khomeini's orders before by constitutional change the post was eliminated; during last twenty years, he wasn't very active politically other than being the member of the "Collective Determination of Regime Expedience" and Khatemi's adviser during his administration.

Mr. Mosavi in his campaign interviews and speeches stresses mostly on the President Ahmadinejad administration lack of technocrats and experts. And he says that he will use capable experts to solve economic problems; he is at odd with Ahmadinejad foreign policy and considers that provocative and adventurous which disregards the international norms and results in increase of animosity toward Islamic Republic and its further isolation. He is against polygamy; he stresses on both Islamism and Republicanism of the regime; he declares his commitment to supreme leader and Islamic Religious establishment. Mr. Mosavi considers himself an independent candidate who looks for support among reformers and fundamentalist. It seems Mr. Mosavi is the kind of candidate who represents the regime's moderate supporters comparable to Ahmadinejad, and we should not forget moderation is a relative concept. It is quite clear that there is a rupture among those which the regime considers inside the regime compare to those it considers outside the regime. The division line already has being drowned: a cleric who is an influential news paper editor calls Ahmadinejad a big liar and asks from Guardian's Council to disqualify him from presidential candidacy; Daughter of Khomeini who leads a women's Islamic organization supports Ahmadinejad because Mosavi considers "Freedom Movement" an Islamic party from the Shah's era acceptable; the party that supported Khatemi is not yet fully brought on board by Mr. Mosavi. He is trying to get mullahs' support and those who are disgusted by Ahmadinejad.

There is another candidate from "Collective Determination of Regime Expedience", Mr. Mohsan Rezaei, the former commander of Pasdaran corps. He is a long shot candidate and Interpol fugitive who run on his capable administrator ability. This is the second time he candidates himself, and in previous election he dropped out prior to Election Day.

It is imperative to understand the characteristics of the current President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad supporters. They are mostly comparable to storm troopers of fascist Germany who by street skirmishes brought the Shah's regime to its knees. Later they formed the core of the two paramilitary organizations of Pasdaran corps and Basige. These loyal cadres of religious establishment, the masters of Islamic Revolution, because of their obedience were trusted with administrative posts. During the last thirty years, they developed their own political ambitions which finally crystallized in last election by installing Ahmadinejad in Presidential Office with well document Pasdaran and Basige meddling in the process of

counting votes. Historically they are roughly similar to Mamluk of Egypt in the thirteen century who began as Turkish slave soldiers serving their masters but eventually became rulers of the country for many centuries.

Generally, Ahmadinejad supporters attach themselves to Khomeini and current supreme leader “Faghih” Khamenei. Mr. Asgar Oladi, one of the original Khomeinist and an agitator in bazaar during the Shah’s rule, as the chief executive of the “Imam and Supreme Leader Followers’ Directive” announced his organization support for Ahmadinejad because he is the closest to the Faghih’s opinion. He spoke of the meetings he and other members of the front had with Ahmadinejad. In these meetings he answered their questions and took into consideration their concerns. Mr. Oladi said that in the Durban human rights convention Mr. Ahmadinejad passed his exam, and in Oladi’s opinion he defended Islamic Republic revolutionary honor very well. He continues, after his performance in Durban many critics of Ahmadinejad left his oppositions and joined his supporters.

After former president Khatemi announced his candidacy, he became subject of pro-government abusive attacks. In the main national publication, which was confiscated by Islamo fascist and apparently is under Faghih’s control, in an article Khatemi was attacked and his terror was implied. Consequently, the reformers publications condemned such a terror treat vehemently. The wife of speaker of the government and publisher of weekly magazine called “Friend of Hezb-Allah” wrote an article, which was posted on numerous internet sites. This article revealed several important points of election’s competing forces. The article’s title is that Khatemi hasn’t reached the threshold of deserving terror. He was compared to former president Hashmi Rafsanjani and his defeat from Ahmadinejad in the last election with abusive language. The hatred and violence revealed by the author in this article against pillars of Islamic revolution and regime demonstrates the seriousness of the split among extremist and moderates fundamentalist. She mentions murder of a historian and two prime ministers with the affirmation (Fatva) of high ranking mullahs in the hand of Hezb-Allah because of their value for Islamic terror contrary to Khatemi.

The two reformer candidates are under constant attacks by the media under government control, and both of them were denied access to national broadcasting organizations while Ahmadinejad enjoys benefits of its propaganda daily. For example: Mr. Karroubi in an open letter criticized editor of Kayhan news paper for accusing and falsifying his views and the other reformer candidate; reformers were accused of having connection with Israeli Zionism regime, the Hezb-Allah catch word being used frequently, because foreign and domestic criticism of Islamic Republic policies are mainly similar. Mr. Karroubi accuses the editor as follows: he deviates from supreme leader directive; propagates lies; miss represents Karroubi’s views and insults him; and calls his friends infiltrators. The major issue of these two pen’s fight was Mr. Karroubi’s children’s executions condemnation which also condemned with international community. The editor interprets this as the candidate collaboration with the chosen enemies of Islamic Republic. The editor’s response prevail his vast number of proving points against Mr. Karroubi: in the editor’s views since all of the accusation that Mr. Karroubi mentions were previously consumed by Royalist, Zionist, and Americans proves his sincere defense of the Islamic Republic. He confirms that he is proud of attacking those who are against Khomeini’s Islamic revolution; those intellectuals who equate culture martyrdom with spreading violence; believe Islam belongs to 1400 years ago and its laws could not be enforced; the Islamic Republic revolution is the reason for Iran’s

backwardness; the house of prophet could be criticized; women scarf and modesty is the sign of backwardness; and Khomeini's thoughts belongs to history's museum.

It seems quite clear that the opposition of reformers is well aware of what they are fighting for. The Khomeinist or Hezb Allah has a well developed ideology, and although it has been wrapped with religious fanaticism its practical implementation is clear. As they profess, they are well prepared for a violent imposition of their Islamist oriented political views as they have done so during Khatemi's administration.

It seems Iran is at a cross road. Also, it seems the legality of popular vote and executive power outweighs traditional institutions of power; hence political forces were convinced and decided the election is where the major campaign will take place. Ahmadinejad during his presidency demonstrated a certain amount of independence from the faction of the religious establishment which he apparently supports; he even outmaneuvered extremist Mullahs by his initiatives. Internally, he eliminated many reformers' executive power bases, and he, overall, further restricted and punished reformers and liberals on a daily bases. There is no doubt that reformers and liberals can win the election, but the question is how they are going to combat election fraud. Already, the two reformer candidates in a letter to Guardian Council asked for establishment of a mechanism for a fair and free election. For the regime Ahmadinejad looks like damaged goods and Mr. Mosavi is the proper option. But for the pro-change and reformers outside regime Mr. Karroubi seems a step forward. In any case superiority of popularly elected president to any other institution is rising.

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