

Iranian opposition demonstrates under pro-imperialist slogans

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Anti-government protests in Iran on Friday confirmed the openly right-wing character of the opposition movement led by defeated presidential candidate Mir Hossein Moussavi. Thousands of Moussavi's supporters, festooned in their trade mark colour of green, took advantage of official Quds Day demonstrations to take to the streets in Tehran and other Iranian cities to demand the resignation of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Quds Day (Quds is Arabic for Jerusalem) is an annual event staged by the Iranian regime as a show of support for the Palestinians. Exploiting the occasion, Moussavi's supporters took to the streets with their own slogans. In opposition to the official support for Iran's allies, Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, the anti-government protesters shouted "No to Gaza and Lebanon, I will give my life for Iran." They countered pro-government chants of "Death to Israel" with the slogan "Death to Russia".

The opposition's attack on the government was from a pro-imperialist standpoint. The political meaning of the slogans was a call for all opposition to be dropped to the predatory actions of the Israeli state and its oppression of the Palestinian people. The chant of "Death to Russia," while immediately aimed at Moscow's support for Ahmadinejad, also carried clear anti-communist overtones, reflecting the sentiment of right-wing, middle class layers among Moussavi's supporters.

The timing of the protests is significant. Moussavi and his supporters were obviously attempting to embarrass Ahmadinejad on the eve of the UN General Assembly session, where he is due to speak. The demonstrations also coincided with an intensified campaign by the Obama administration and its allies to put pressure on Iran before October 1 talks over its nuclear programs. Washington is threatening punishing new economic

sanctions if Tehran fails to comply with its demands to shut down the country's uranium enrichment facilities.

While media coverage is limited, opposition protesters appear to have acted quite provocatively, seeking out rather than avoiding far larger official demonstrations, and taunting pro-government supporters. Opposition leaders may well have calculated that a government crackdown, picked up and inflated in the media, would have added to the pressure on Ahmadinejad. Despite an official ban on opposition protests, the police and militia seem to have largely stood back. The international press highlighted the jostling of former President Mohammad Khatami, but reported no violent incidents or arrests.

Opposition protests first erupted after the country's presidential election in June. Based on unsubstantiated claims that the poll had been rigged, Moussavi's mainly middle class supporters staged large rallies demanding the result be overturned and new elections held. The US and international media mounted a frenzied campaign in support of this "colour revolution" with the clear aim of installing a regime in Tehran more amenable to American and European interests.

The last significant pro-Moussavi protests took place in July. State repression played a role in ending the demonstrations. Clearly nervous about its own shaky position, the regime cracked down on the protests, arrested opposition figures and staged televised show trials to smear its opponents. Allegations of torture forced Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to order the closure of one prison.

More fundamentally, however, the collapse of the protests reflected the movement's class character. Moussavi and other so-called reformers, including the

billionaire former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, represent a faction of the clerical regime that advocates a pro-market agenda and seeks a rapprochement with the US in an attempt to overcome the country's deepening economic crisis. Hostile to figures like Rafsanjani and bitter over the economic impact of previous reformist administrations, workers and the rural poor have not supported the opposition.

In his official Quds Day speech, President Ahmadinejad again questioned the Nazi Holocaust, as a means of countering the policies of Israel and US imperialism in the Middle East. As reported on his presidential web site, Ahmadinejad declared: "The pretext for establishing the Zionist regime is a lie; a lie which relies on an unreliable claim, a mythical claim, and the occupation of Palestine has nothing to do with the Holocaust."

The president's comments mix together empty demagoguery over the establishment of Israel as an agency of imperialism, with denials of the Nazi Holocaust that only encourage anti-Semitism and play directly into the hands of the US and Israel. The reactionary character of Ahmadinejad's "questioning" of the Holocaust was underscored by the officially sponsored conference of Holocaust deniers in Tehran in 2006 which provided a platform for fascist elements such as David Duke, a former Klu Klux Klan "Imperial Wizard" and self-proclaimed "white nationalist" racist. (See: Iran's Holocaust conference and the dead end of bourgeois nationalism)

For all his denunciations of Israel, Ahmadinejad carefully avoided any reference to the criminal role of US imperialism in the Middle East. "If war waged in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is because of Zionists' provocation," he said. If Sudan is suppressed, it is because of Zionists' temptations. Zionists are behind all the conspiracies of the arrogance and colonialism." While Israel undoubtedly is involved in many regional intrigues, it is indisputable that the US is responsible for the neo-colonial occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and is the prime instigator of other conflicts, including in Sudan. Moreover, the US is the chief financial backer and weapons supplier to Israel.

The avoidance of any direct criticism of the US is no accident. While perhaps more cautious than the so-called reformers, Ahmadinejad and his backers, including Supreme Leader Khamenei, are looking for a deal with

Washington that would end the present sanctions on Iran and open up the country for much-needed investment in the energy sector. While denouncing "Zionism" over the Iraq and Afghan wars, the Iranian regime collaborated with the US invasions and continues to assist Washington in stabilising the occupations.

The events of Quds Day in Tehran underscore the fact that the disputes between Ahmadinejad and Moussavi reflect purely tactical differences within the Iranian bourgeoisie over economic and foreign policy. As demonstrated by their slogans, Moussavi, Rafsanjani and the other "reformers" simply represent an openly pro-imperialist faction that is intent on dumping the old rhetoric, along with any ties to Hamas and Hezbollah, as rapidly as possible in order to secure a place within a US-dominated Middle East and open the doors to foreign capital.

The right-wing evolution of the Iranian opposition fully vindicates the analysis made by the WSW and International Committee of the Fourth International and constitute a devastating political indictment of the middle class, ex-left groups such as the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) in France and the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which all rallied behind Moussavi and Rafsanjani and continue to support them. These organisations are all complicit in the efforts of the Western powers and their intelligence agencies, which have sought to exploit the political turmoil in Iran to install a regime more favourable to Western economic and strategic interests, particularly those of US imperialism.



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