

Elections Bring Change in Iran: Will the United States Change?

by Hussein Askary

June 21—Iranian moderate candidate Hassan Rouhani won an outright majority of the votes (more than 50%) in the Iranian presidential election on June 14, and was declared President-elect of the Islamic Republic of Iran, making a second round of voting unnecessary. The elections were held in a calm atmosphere, and there have been no challenges to the result from conservative candidates. In the last elections in 2009, the second round between reformist Mir-Hossein Musavi and President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad led to tensions and eventually to riots and destabilizations, including operations backed and run by British intelligence, that threatened the whole nation.

Of the 35,458,000 valid votes, Rouhani won 18,613,000. He ran against five other contenders, mostly conservatives, the strongest being the governor of Tehran, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who received 6,077,000 votes. The others were Saeed Jalili (Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and Iran's chief nuclear negotiator); Mohsen Rezaei (former Commander of the Iranian Army); Ali Akbar Velayati (former foreign minister, and reportedly the closest to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei); and Mohammad Gharazi (independent reformist).

All the opponents were reported by the Iranian News Agency (IRNA) to have congratulated Rouhani for his victory, wished him success, and "offered to help him build the nation." The contenders stated that "the real winner was the Iranian people."

According to the report of the Interior Ministry, 50,483,192 people were eligible to vote in the presidential elections. The turnout was 72.7%.

Supreme Leader Khamenei gave Rouhani his official blessings, while giving credit to the Iranian people and the Iranian system for the victory. He said that "the enthusiastic participation of people in the presidential elections on Friday was a brilliant test of Iranians' determination and an increasing political growth and peo-

ple's insistence on religious democracy." He added: "Faithful Iranians in yesterday's elections showed their huge capacity in facing wisely the psychological war of hegemonic powers." He stressed that "the real winner of yesterday's election was the Iranian nation."

More assuring that Rouhani's victory will not be challenged, was a public message of congratulations from the chairman of the Assembly of Experts, Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani, sent to Rouhani on June 16. The Ayatollah also congratulated the Iranian nation on "creating a political epic on June 14." He further wished success to Rouhani and his future government.

It was that Assembly which excluded the other reformist candidate, Hashemi Rafsanjani, and many other candidates from the elections. It is the second most powerful conservative (unelected) institution after the Supreme Leader Khamenei.

Majlis (parliament) Speaker Ali Larijani also issued congratulations to Rouhani, saying the new President "can rely on people's high turnout in the Friday election in order to solve the existing problems in the country, including unemployment and rising prices." He said the Majlis will heartily cooperate with the new government to meet the nation's demands.

There were no signs of disturbances in the streets of Tehran or other major cities. Hundreds of supporters of Rouhani gathered outside his campaign headquarters in Tehran, shouting slogans of victory, but were politely asked by the police to leave the premises, as such gatherings require permission.

A Potential Game-Changer

While it is not clear yet what kinds of disagreements will emerge between the President and his conservative rivals in the near future, as happened with former reformist President Mohammad Khatami, it is ultimately the U.S. and European policy towards Iran, and the

British ability to manipulate the United States and to sow discord in the region, that will determine what direction this President will take.

Rouhani is no outsider to the institutions of the government and revolution in Iran. He is a Mujtahid in Islamic Shi'a theology (a very high rank in the clergy). He has been a member of the Assembly of Experts since 1999, member of the Expediency Council (headed by Rafsanjani) since 1991, and most importantly, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council for 16 years under Presidents Rafsanjani (1989-97) and Khatami (1997-2005). During the second term of Khatami's presidency, Rouhani served as the chief nuclear negotiator with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the West from 2003 to

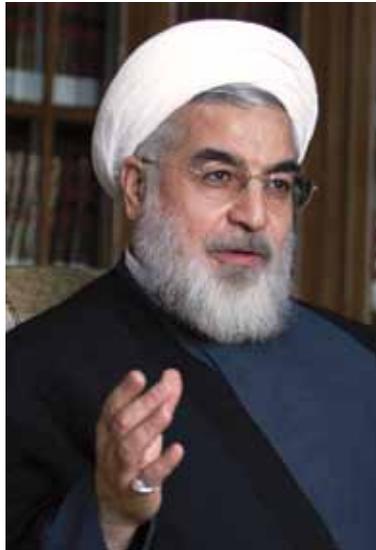
2005. He is an inside witness to the sabotage of these talks by the George W. Bush and Tony Blair governments. Rouhani wrote a book on this subject and Iran's nuclear strategy in detail, titled *National Security and Nuclear Diplomacy*, published in October 2011 (in Farsi) by the Center for Strategic Research (CSR) in Tehran, of which he has been president until now. The CSR will be an important feature in President-elect Rouhani's coming government, especially his expected foreign policy.

Among his credentials are a Master's degree in law and a Ph.D. in constitutional law from Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland, which gives him insight and knowledge into Western thought processes and history.

Rouhani is supported by both Khatami's "green revolution," which demands a real reform and modernization of the political system of Iran to become a true constitutional republic, rather than staying in a hybrid state between elected institutions and non-elected theological institutions (without challenging the excessive power of the Supreme Leader), and by the Rafsanjani faction which is a more liberal, free-trade-oriented elite.

Shift from Ahmadinejad

The election of Rouhani, and by a landslide too, was a big surprise for all observers and even the Iranian people. All efforts by the Ahmadinejad government and conservative institutions were directed to exclude and discredit the reformist candidates. The fact that the vote



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The landslide victory and high voter turnout for President-elect Hassan Rouhani signify that the Iranian people are longing for a real change in their economic conditions.

went to the only moderate candidate, shows that even the pro-conservative people (mostly poor) are longing for a real change in economic conditions. President Ahmadinejad came to office with the promise of helping the poor and reforming the corruption of the merchant ("bazaar")-dominated economy, but achieved very little, as inflation soared, and the government was forced to push more austerity and remove state subsidies for food and fuel. Of course, these conditions were imposed by U.S. and European economic sanctions, but Ahmadinejad's provocative tone and often insane statements against Israel and the West, made things worse in the eyes of the Iranian people.

An American expert on Iran noted to *EIR* that when a serious rift devel-

oped between President Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader Khamenei, Rafsanjani clearly sided with Khamenei. An understanding was reached between the two that, while Rafsanjani was himself eliminated from the list of approved Presidential candidates, Khamenei would not block the Rafsanjani-backed candidate Rouhani. A combination of forces gelled behind Rouhani, contributing to the landslide victory. The clergy, worried that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was amassing too much power and was on the verge of challenging clerical rule, was fully behind Rouhani, the only cleric on the ballot. The conservative Principalist Faction had three candidates, and the votes were split among them. The bazaar also turned in support of Rouhani.

So, it was an across-the-board victory and it has profound implications. In his first post-election press conference, Rouhani clearly distinguished himself from Ahmadinejad, declaring that Iran would seek a fresh start in foreign relations, including with the United States. He laid out the criteria for a major improvement in Iranian-American relations, including an end to U.S. interference into the internal affairs of Iran, and a recognition of Iran's legitimate rights under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Trita Parsi, the head of the National Iranian-American Council and a strong advocate of normalization of relations between Washington and Tehran, noted that Rouhani has never been associated with the reformist



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Supporters of Rouhani rally in Tehran on June 13, the day before the election.

camp, but is an experienced moderate who has the potential to unite the country around urgently needed economic recovery.

Rouhani has recently focused on the economic issues. In recent public remarks, he said that his priority is to combat unemployment and the effects of the economic sanctions imposed on Iran. One interesting sign of his thinking about the impact of large-scale infrastructure, is his campaign's promotion of a major project to replenish the drying saltwater Uromia Lake by building a canal from the Caspian Sea. Supporters of Rouhani recently sent this campaign website to this author (<http://www.urmiacampaign.com/>), seeking public support and claiming that this would be one of the first large-scale economic projects Rouhani would undertake if elected President.

Rouhani is also a supporter of nuclear power and technology, although he stated recently that building new nuclear plants "should not come at the expense of the economy and the well-being of the population," a somewhat populist statement which seeks to indicate that he is more focused on alleviating the current economic difficulties of the people than on future plans.

U.S. and British Policy

As stated above, the direction in which Washington moves—either with the British Empire for a World War III starting in Southwest Asia and Syria specifically, or

with Russia to find a peaceful way out of the current tragedy, to a world order based on peace through economic development—will determine the policies of every government in the region, including Iran. From 1997 to 2005, the West had everything they could possibly hope for from Iran, in the person of a great President (ranked as a philosopher), Khatami, who initiated a "Dialogue of Civilizations" and was open to every possible American diplomatic move that preserved for Iran its sovereignty and independence. But that did not prevent the British from sabotaging every move he made. With the 9/11/2001 Anglo-Saudi assault on the United States, and the following wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, every initiative Khatami had worked for

was dismantled.

Britain's Tony Blair did not wait long after Rouhani's election to rave against Iran and call for war on both Iran and its ally Syria. Blair, who spoke on June 19 at the annual Presidential Conference in Jerusalem, echoing threats by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the day before, said, according to the *New Scotsman*: "Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions and export of terrorism round the region are a threat. We must be determined to confront and overcome that threat." He raved: "Those who truly hold the power in Iran must know of our determination and feel its vigor... Of course, any choice involving military action is fraught. No one wants it. But a nuclear armed Iran is the worst choice and we shouldn't make it."

Blair attacked those in the West who are trying to avoid war, stating: "Undoubtedly the predominant emotion in the West today is to stay out of Syria; indeed to stay out of the region's politics... But as every day that passes shows, the cost of staying out may be paid in a higher price later. [We] should understand: The window of opportunity will be open for only a short period of time. We must go through it together. If not, the window will close and could close forever. Time is not our friend. This is urgent. This is now."

Blair and Netanyahu's arguments are meant to tell policymakers in the U.S. especially, and the West generally, that there is nothing new in the Iranian situation,

as “those who truly hold the power” are not the President, his people, nor the millions who voted for him.

It is important for the Iranian leaders and people not to respond in knee-jerk fashion to such provocations, as did President Ahmedinejad in recent years.

Iran’s Foreign Policy

Even before Rouhani is inaugurated on Aug. 14, two issues will dominate the foreign policy discussion in Iran: dialogue with the U.S., and economic cooperation as a means for establishing peace and stability in Iran’s neighboring regions.

While former President Ahmedinejad emphatically refused a dialogue with the United States, the Supreme Leader left the issue contingent on the U.S. respecting Iran’s rights, although he maintained a very skeptical tone about the possibility that the U.S. would ever do that. However, the institution of the presidency and its foreign policy branch will have the freedom to pursue this avenue.

One key spokesman for the Rouhani foreign policy, and the foremost candidate for the post of foreign minister, is Dr. Mahmoud Vaezi, director of the CSR under Rouhani, who also led Rouhani’s presidential campaign’s foreign policy team. Dr. Vaezi is longtime foreign policy expert and was the official envoy of President Rafsanjani and mediator in the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict in the 1990s. He has been, since 1999, an advisor on foreign policy to the Expediency Council of Iran, also headed by Rafsanjani. He has had a team of both seasoned and younger diplomats working with him at the CSR on Iran’s foreign policy, especially in relation to Europe and United States. His acquaintance with the United States comes partially from his years as a young man earning his Bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering from Sacramento State University, and his Master’s in electrical engineering at San Jose State University, both in California. He was also a Ph.D. candidate in telecommunications/engineering at Louisiana State University.

For Vaezi, two issues are clear: Iran’s disputes with the United States and the West generally can only be solved through a direct dialogue/negotiations with the



IRNS/Hussein Askary

Dr. Mahmoud Vaezi in his office in the Center for Strategic Research in Tehran. He is reportedly the first candidate for the post of Foreign Minister in President-elect Hassan Rouhani’s government.

U.S. Administration, a dialogue conforming to Iran’s legitimate national interests, and not a foreign agenda. The other issue is to develop Iran’s economy and make restore its role as a leading nation in the region, an indispensable partner in regional trade and cooperation, and a key source of energy.

Vaezi made the first point very clear in a televised debate with Ali Baqeri, the foreign policy advisor to conservative candidate Said Jalili. According to Iranian English-language Press TV, Baqeri first pointed to Rouhani’s statements that, instead of negotiating with the EU, Iran would be better off hammering things out with the U.S., as the “sheriff.” “Once we admit that there is a sheriff, we expect them to give us our share,

so we would no longer try to gain our rights. Cooperation with Western and European countries was conducted within this framework at that time, where different negotiations were held in Tehran, Brussels, and Paris. The end result of that cooperative trend was the fact that we accepted and gave them all they demanded.”

Baqeri asserted that instead of following the international community, the country needs to work toward achieving its rights on its own.

In reply, Vaezi said that the task for the country is not to pursue its “share,” but its rights in the international system. “Here it is clear that Mr. Jalili’s outlook is an extension of Ahmadinejad’s,” he said. “This sort of foreign policy is of a contestant category that is at loggerheads with everyone. Such a foreign policy will surely fail to uphold our national interests and security. We adopted an extremist approach and quarreled with different countries, and that reminds us of the Taliban’s policy. When it rose to power, Taliban adopted the same approach. It is even likely that they are somehow guided by the Taliban. This is a defective policy.”

He also criticized the Ahmadinejad Administration’s outlook toward Israel: “Mentioning the Holocaust makes Israel appear mistreated. That was the foreign policy which brought us economic sanctions, five UN resolutions, and two statements.” He stressed that “as long as this policy prevails, neither the nuclear issue nor the country’s economic problems will be solved.”

Vaezi asserted, “What is important to us in nuclear negotiations is the outcome. Diplomacy will not progress with slogans, it is rather result-bound.”

A 20-Year Economic Vision

The Iranian leadership adopted in 2002 a 20-year economic Vision Plan, which was approved by the Expediency Council. The plan envisions independent economic development based on making Iran a developed nation by 2025, and a leading economic, scientific, and technological power in the region through increased investments in scientific and technological research, especially in agricultural, biotechnological, nuclear, IT technology, space science, and similar frontier fields. The proportion of R&D in GDP is to increase from 1% to 5%. The focus will be oriented toward the education and employment of the very young population of Iran.

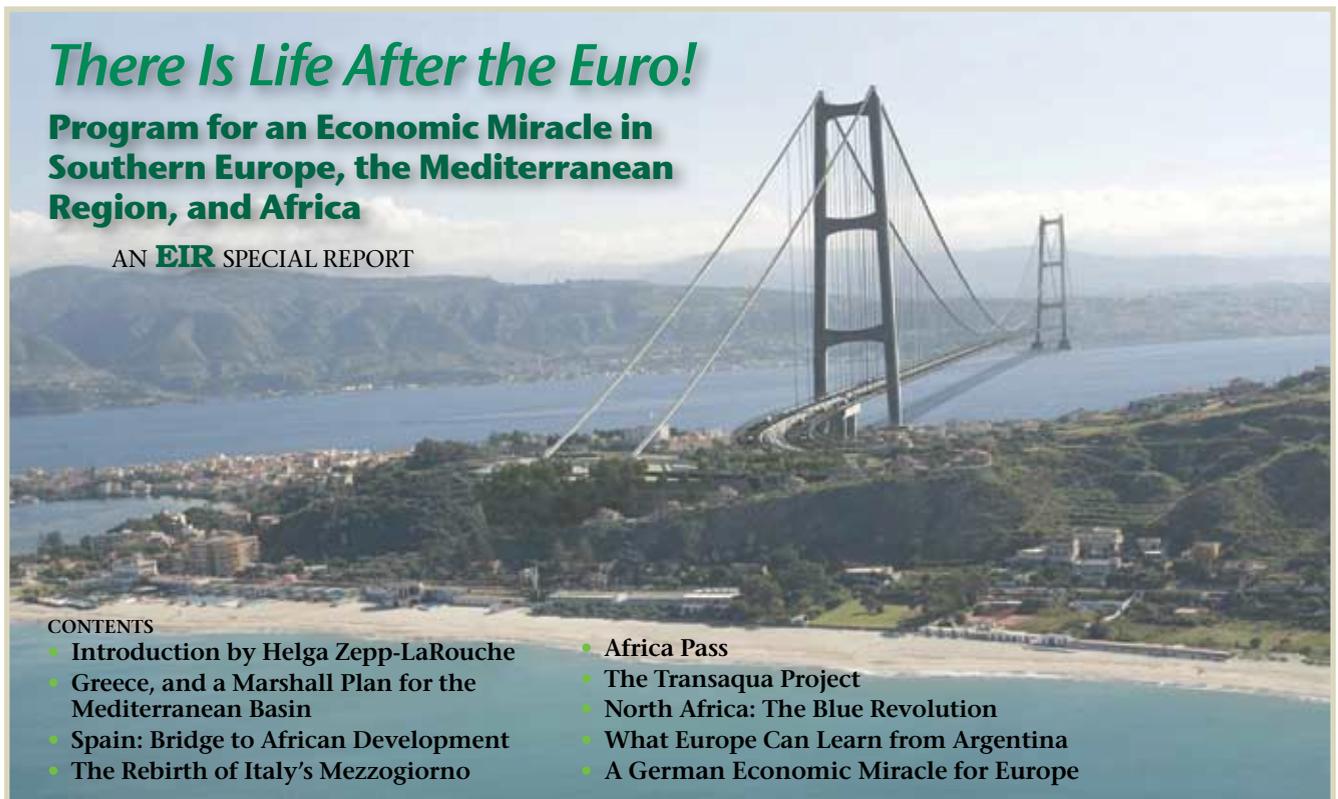
Unfortunately, because of the very harsh economic sanctions imposed on Iran by the UN Security Council, the United States, and Europe, in addition to the destabilization of the whole Southwest Asia region through the Afghanistan war, the invasion of Iraq, and currently the war on Syria, these plans were not implemented fully.

However, Iran has nevertheless managed, especially in the field of large-scale infrastructure and the transcontinental transportation sector, to make for itself a key position in trade between Asia, Europe, and Africa. (See “Iran a Bridge Among Continents,” *EIR*, April 5, 2013; and “The Persian Gulf: Peace and Construction or War and Destruction,” *EIR*, May 10, 2013.

Despite its fierce sense of independence, it is clear that Iran cannot exist in isolation, and that it cannot progress without reliance on other nations’ scientific and technological achievements, a fact which was admitted even by Ayatollah Khamenei in a speech regarding the 20-Year Vision Plan.

Dr. Vaezi is one of the people who constructively oriented Iran’s foreign policy toward this development plan and drafted the key component of it. In his strategic paper published in March 2009 (available in English on the website of the CSR) “Iran’s Constructive Foreign Policy under the 20-Year Vision Plan,” he detailed how the foreign policy of Iran should be steered to comply with and aid the plan.

“The present article,” he writes, “investigates the necessity of providing internal conditions; the develop-



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ment of the country is dependent upon providing suitable international conditions through interactional and constructive orientation. The development of a country depends on the creation of an environment without any tension in foreign relations and with profitable global facilities like high technology and international financial facilities, as much as possible, as well as a foreign policy that is based on constructive interaction with the world, as it is in 'The 20-Year Vision Plan' document. This document can provide a suitable environment by creating balanced relations without any tension and moving toward creating trust, security, and peace, so that foreign investment and new technologies may develop the country."

Dr. Vaezi also argues for matching utterances of the policy with the aims of the nation, rather than achieving rhetorical effects and gaining populist sympathy: "As a country that makes developmental progress its main goal in the next 20 years, Iran needs a constructive foreign policy to make the required infrastructure for the country's development in this light. On this route, in the first instance, the progress of development should be treated as one of the main priorities in both the words and attitude of foreign policy, in a way that it often is not."

Vaezi lists 15 objectives of Iran's new foreign policy, all of which are relevant; however, we take objective number 9 as representative of the general approach:

"9. The necessity of interaction with the world economy for the realization of development: Since, in the new world, realization of development on national levels, through constructive interaction with the world economy, is easier and quicker, every government that has adopted development as a necessity and an end of its foreign policy, should make a constructive and active interaction with elements of global economy."

Lyndon LaRouche and *EIR* have long emphasized the key concept of "peace through economic development," especially with regard to the war-torn, but strategically important areas of the world. In Iran, it seems that this concept has met a matured host.

These presidential elections and a definite positive shift in Iran's outlook has to be met with openness and trust from the United States specifically, and the West generally. Diplomacy and the pursuit of happiness of every nation lies in the realization that the "benefit of the other," and scientific and cultural progress, are the universal language that should be spoken by all nations and peoples.