

The West Betrays the Iranian Protest Movement

by Matthias Küntzel

The Iranians who are resisting the electoral putsch are not only being humiliated and beaten by the batons and bullets of the Pasdaran but also by the inaction of the so-called freedom-loving world: no call for a special session of the UN, no threats of sanctions, no boycott declaration, no economic embargo, not even the smallest warning—let's just not take sides or make any commitments as long as the result of the struggle in Iran remains open.

The West, so the argument goes, has to be careful to avoid providing any pretext to vilify the Iranian opposition. So Obama doesn't need days but weeks to slowly pull back his outstretched hand, while the German Foreign Ministry argues all the more emphatically for a dialogue with the putsch-regime. Undauntedly, the German-Iranian Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Tehran advertises the building of a German-Iranian Business Center in Berlin, while the German-Iranian Chamber of Commerce in Hamburg reported today that its upcoming seminar on "Export Certification in Iran Trade" (July 13) is already overcrowded. And haven't we gotten along somehow or other with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the past four years?

But this time this optimistic hope that things will just go on is a self-deception. Khamenei and Ahmadinejad represent the apocalyptic wing of the regime that has just carried out a coup d'etat. Both of them have politicized the mystical image of the Shiite Messiah, the "twelfth Imam," and they have mystified politics through appeals to the alleged will of that imaginary creature. In his Friday sermon, Khamenei attributed even the high electoral participation to the influence of that same twelfth Imam.

For Ahmadinejad the return of the Messiah, so longed for, depends on maximal chaos and unrest in the world and on the destruction of Israel. It is therefore only consistent for him to regard the "nuclearization of Iran" as the "beginning of a fundamental change in the world."

If it had just been a normal military dictatorship that had seized power through a putsch in Iran, that would have been bad enough. But we are facing a completely unconstrained antisemitic-apocalyptic clique. For it, terror at home is the precondition for terror

abroad. It wants to fuse the destructive power of the nuclear bomb with the fury of a religious war compounded by a craze for martyrdom—a combination that has never existed since the beginning of the nuclear age.

About two years ago, Nicolas Sarkozy warned of a "catastrophic alternative": either the Iranian bomb or the bombing of Iran. He proposed negotiations as the last resort. Yet this path is blocked because Khamenei does not want to negotiate.

Today the uprising in Iran sheds new light on the nuclear dispute. Since June 12, defusing the bomb is now linked to the victory of the democracy movement. The help that the West withholds today will turn back on it as nuclear terror tomorrow.

A first step would be a condemnation and isolation of the illegitimate regime. In this sense, Chapter VII, Article 41, of the Charter of the United Nations authorizes "complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations." What Germany does, or refrains from doing, carries particular weight in Iran. The longer Chancellor Merkel only offers soothing words instead of initiating massive sanctions, the smaller the chances of the democratic uprising and the greater the danger of the nuclear threat.

Translated from German by Russell Berman.

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