

## **The Regime**

### Ahmadinejad

- AN represents a generation of war vets who felt the power structure had cast them aside. Key characteristics of this generation:
  - Young and confident
  - Revolutionary success
  - The Iran-Iraq War
    - root of their anti-West sentiments
    - self-sufficiency and reliance
  - They believe that the true path of the revolution has been deviated from and the IRI's bureaucracy has become corrupt
- Despite some irregularities in the vote, I do believe he really won in the second round
  - Same phenomenon we see in Latin America with Lula, Chavez and now in Bolivia where after a wave of democratic changes, the blue collar voter opted for the populist
  - Thus, his mandate is really an economic one and a call for social justice
  - He himself seems to be convinced that he also has a mandate to fight "social corruption and vice", which will surely have a backlash if he tries.
- Many analysts were predicting a consolidation of the conservative faction, but were proven wrong
  - Truth is that the Iranian conservatives are as varied and divided as the reformists were
  - I would argue, in fact, that the way the IRI is set up, consolidation of power in the hands of a single faction is practically impossible
- Important to note that A-N is a weak president
  - Not being taken seriously
  - Even within the exec branch, can hear many officials overtly being disrespectful to him, particularly those in the middle ranks
  - Many simply refused to work with him and resigned see AN too far below themselves to agree to report to him
  - Other examples:
    - IRIB and his movie
    - Majles calling him in at committee level and questioning what he's doing on the FP level
    - His cabinet selection process
    - Larijani at odds and reporting directly to the SL
    - etc
- The system is positioning itself to increasingly contain him, much in the same way as they contained Khatami
  - Gradual whittling away of his authority

- Passing that authority to parallel institutions
- SL in a bit of a tough place, but ultimately playing his usual more patient game with the aim of empowering himself at the end of it
  - It worked under Khatami!
  - In addition, originally supported A-N, so hard to do a 180 immediately
  - Notice the conditional support he gives the president: “too early to judge, give him time...”
- Key difference with Khatami’s containment
  - On one side he’s much weaker than Khatami – much less support base within regime and the people
  - But also not the type of guy to go down w/o making a fuss
- AN’s best game is trying to get Iran to a state of international isolation and to return things to the way they used to be, with the masses rallied behind the regime based on a particular slogan
  - This explains his anti-Israeli remarks to me. I think he first tripped on it by mistake and then realized the potential
  - He’s essentially killed any prospect of an Iran-US rapprochement for the next 4 yrs at least
  - So, while I do think he is a man of ideology (the whole messiah argument) and all that, as well as that he is an inexperienced man who puts his foot in his mouth, at this point I’d argue his statements are very much understood and calculated
- On Iran’s FP posturing in general and the nuclear question in particular, I would just like to point out:
  - A new narrative is being constructed in Iran about how to drive a successful FP
  - Not just AN, but I would say Larijani and those in charge of the SNSC agree on this point: that Iran has to deal with the West from the position of strength
  - They argue that détente failed and standing up to the West worked.
    - Whether that is true or not different issue, this is their perception
  - The president of Iran does not control FP. He has some influence on it, but is by no means the loudest voice, particularly this president
    - Rather it is the perception that the US is after getting the regime and the only way out is

## **Society**

- Amazing part about Iran is that everything sounds a lot more dramatic from the outside than it is inside.
- Society has been under emergency conditions for so long that it’s learned to ignore everything and keep going the best it can.

- Recent friend visiting was shocked to see a boy and girl kissing on the lips in public!
- Basically, if you don't read the headlines of newspapers, you couldn't tell anything has changed in Iran
- Of course, AN and his cabinet are already tampering with things like cinema and publishing rights, but his directives to the IRIB are being overtly ignored
- I would also argue that Iranian society is still hoping for change from within through transformation.
  - Turn out at a greatly flawed elections show this
  - Also, the pictures of what is going on in Iraq reminded them that it is not a choice nec between authoritarianism and democracy, but rather between security and the right to vote in a free elections
- For now the society is focused on economic and social justice issues and tired of political posturing
  - Heard enough of that during Khatami's era

### Policy Recs

- Very hard to devise policy on Iran at this point. I want to acknowledge that I don't envy you the least bit
- The policies have to be devised in a way that they send separate messages to the regime and the people
  - I'm actually optimistic on this, bc I have seen the US be able to pull it off with the former Soviet Union
- But ultimately, US needs to be careful not to fall into the AN trap of turning the nuclear issue into a mass mobilization factor touching on nationalist sentiments and pride
- He WANTS to isolate Iran
- We need to empower the groups that are containing him, not give him and his fellows ammunition
- Remember, every group currently trying to contain him -- both within the bureaucracy and also within civil society and the business community -- is doing so b/c they've learned about the value of being integrated in the global community.
- Keep in mind that right now, from Monarchist to Mullah, majority of Iranians against giving up enrichment rights permanently
- Need to put the IRI in the 1982 situation
- Finally, since I doubt you will take my advice about trying to talk directly with the Iranians at this point, particularly as you worry it would be "rewarding" AN, let me add the following
  - While toughening up on Iran, send the people real signals. Not just talk, but things like lifting ban on export of plane parts
    - Let the IRI deal with the onus of mismanagement!
  - MKOs freehand in the US is very upsetting to Iranians and also proof of US hypocrisy
  - Keep listening to more ideas and more people, to make sure you don't get misled by the Iranian version of a Chalabi
  - But also internationally widen the group you get intel from
    - EU and Israel have their own agendas

- I'd also ask, for example, the Indian intel about their assessment and takes on things