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**Illusion, Reality & Courage in Iran
Left Margin
By Carl Bloice
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In the movie "The Year of Living Dangerously" the little guy Billy Kwan, brilliantly played by Linda Lee, gives a news reporter Guy Hamilton, played by Mel Gibson, a talk about Indonesian puppets - the kind on sticks, which you can now sometime find in import shops in this country. The figures as shown are shadows from behind a screen. What you, see - thousands of protestors in the streets, police repression, official statements and the like - the guide explains, is the image; what is really going on behind the screen you cannot see. "Look at the shadows, not at the puppet," Kwan tells Hamilton.

At the time of this writing former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, an opponent of officially-reelected President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is holed up in the religious center of Qum. Speculation is that he is contemplating his next move as members of his family including his daughter, Faezeh Hashemi are arrested held for several hours and then released. What's that all about? Who knows? It's one many mysteries inside mysteries made more illusory by the regime's near complete media ban instituted while the police and militia thugs beat and murder supporters of officially defeated opposition presidential candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi.

As much as what is being played out behind and in front of the screen is reminiscent of the screen in Jakarta in 1956, it also harkens to other recent times in Iran itself. In the summer of 1981, after the fall of the U.S. backed Shah, the new president Bani-Sadr, who had been elected with 75 percent of the vote, was driven from office as ultra-religious militia surrounded his office and shouted "Death to the Second Shah."

Bani-Sadr had accompanied revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini home from his Parisian exile in 1979 and was elected president in 1980.

Bani-Sadr today lives in exile in Paris where in an interview last week he told Reuters, "This movement shows that the people want democracy and the regime isn't

democratic, so the movement won't stop. It is going to continue in one way or another," he said. "The conscience of this people has condemned the regime. That's quite certain and anyone can see it."

Bani-Sadr told Reuters the demonstrations that followed the June 12th disputed election have spread beyond a movement in support of Mousavi. "It's at the level of the national conscience and in that sense, it resembles the movement at the time of the Shah."

Asked about the response of President Barak Obama to the events in Iran, Bani-Sadr replied. "It was a good reaction. It doesn't allow the regime to use outside intervention as a justification for repression," he said, adding that former President George W. Bush's hostile rhetoric had ensured "immobility" in Iran. "It paralyzed Iranians. During the entire period of Mr. Bush, there was no movement in Iran. After him, there is another president, a new policy and there is movement in Iran." Asked about the statements of French President Nicolas Sarkozy who had denounced the election as a fraud, he said, "It would have been much better if he had remained silent because a people needs to be able to say 'I decide my own fate, it doesn't come from outside.' Iranians are very sensitive about this point."

It's a point that one would think the people in Washington would have appreciated after decades of U.S. interference in the oil-rich country's affairs. It's also common sense and pollsters say that most people in the U.S. support the Obama's public reaction to the Iranian crisis. The other day CNN conducted an online poll - people at home in front of the telly in the middle of the day - and 70 percent of the respondents backed the White House stance.

But nothing has tempered the storm of protest directed at the President. Obama has said openly that what he wanted to avoid was making himself and the U.S. the subject of the Iranian political struggle. Good thinking. What has happened, however, is that Iran has become the subject of political struggle in the U.S. - or, rather a weapon in the hand of those sought to destroy the Obama Presidency.

Make no mistake about it that's what the right wing and leading people in the Republican Party are out to do. Talk show demagogue and Republican leader Russ Limbaugh's wish that Obama crash was only the opening shot. Policy differences are one thing but what we have here is something else; these people are out to undermine Obama (Without a doubt some of the tactics have had a decidedly racist undertone). New York Times columnist Paul Krugman got it right Monday: "The Republicans, with a few possible exceptions, have decided to do all they can to make the Obama administration a failure."

For over two weeks, from every platform they could command, leading spokespersons for the Republican Party have attacked the President for being what one of them said was being "timid and passive" in response to the events in Iran.

Noconservative Robert Kagan has written in the Washington Post that Obama's "strategy toward Iran places him objectively on the side of the government's efforts to return to normalcy as quickly as possible, not in league with the opposition's efforts."

And rightwinger Charles Krauthammer has suggested the President is giving "implicit support for this repressive, tyrannical regime".

Often times, major media has played along making it appear as if the big, crucial question is what the President has said or not said. Although it has seen little reflection

in most of the major media in this country, the events in Iran have had a reflection in the conflict in the broader Middle East, specifically as regards the Palestinian- Israeli conflict.

"Ahmadinejad's victory will serve as further proof that diplomacy with Iran is not an option, from the point of view of Israel and its supporters in the US. Whether Obama will proceed with his positive rhetoric towards Iran remains to be seen," wrote Ramzy Baroud in the Palestine Chronicle. "Failure to do so, however, will further undermine his country's interests in the Middle East, and will prolong the atmosphere of animosity, espoused by a clique of neoconservative hardliners throughout the years of the Bush administration."

"Why Iran's Ahmadinejad is preferred in Israel," read a June 21 article in the Christian Science Monitor. Correspondent Joshua Mitnick wrote that "even though Mr. Ahmadinejad has threatened the Jewish state with destruction, many officials and analysts here actually prefer the incumbent president because - short of the downfall of Iran's theocratic system of government - he'll be easier to isolate. Reformist leader Mr. Moussavi, by contrast, isn't expected to alter Iran's drive for nuclear power, but he would win international sympathy."

"The incumbent president will be easier to isolate than reformist leader Mr. Mousavi, say some leading Israeli policymakers." Mitnick reported that "Mossad Chief Meir Dagan, Israel's top spy, told a group of Israeli lawmakers, "If the reformist candidate Mousavi had won, Israel would have had a more serious problem, because it would need to explain to the world the danger of the Iranian threat."

"If I were enfranchised in this election... I would vote for Ahmadinejad," Middle East Forum president Daniel Pipes said earlier this month. "I would prefer to have an enemy who's forthright and obvious, who wakes people up with his outlandish statements."

"This line of thought is echoed by many in Israel, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud party have historically had close ties with U.S. neo-conservatives," observed Daniel Luban in an article for Inter Press Service titled, "US-IRAN: Electoral Chaos Energises Neoconservative Hawks."

However, there is not full agreement in leading Israeli political circles on this, wrote Mitnick. Israeli President Shimon Peres encouraged Iranian protestors and "courageous" women who he said were trying to "reclaim" their culture. He added that it's more important to have regime change in Iran than an end to the country's controversial nuclear program. "You never know what will disappear in Iran first - their enriched uranium or their poor government," said Peres. "I hope their poor government will disappear first."

There is a direct contention between the attitude in Tel Aviv to the crisis in Iran and U.S. policy. Ever since President Obama's historic address at Cairo University, the rightwing leaders of the Israeli government have been trying to change the subject. Time and time again they have declared that rather than an agreement with the Palestinians the important question in the region is the Iranian nuclear enrichment process and have continued to threaten a military attack on Iran. Obviously, a change in government in Tehran would throw coldwater on any such intention- at least for a while.

This reality has not been lost on the Israeli government's backers in the U.S. According to the Israeli media, Senate majority leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) recently sent a letter

to President Barack Obama on his tough policy against Israel in a public letter he sent last week disagreeing strong with the President's approach the Middle East. "It is also vital [the Israeli-PA] process not take away from your commitment to deal with the ongoing threat from Iran," Reid declared. "I believe that resolving the problem of Iran's nuclear program will help facilitate the Arab-Israeli peace process."

Like the little guy said, there are a lot of forces at work here, both on the screen, behind it and in the shadows. Someday, we will have a better picture of what is going on. In the meantime, there can be little question who deserves the admiration and support of progressive movements and people worldwide. They are the women, students, workers, shopkeepers and others waving green banners with such courage. Somewhere down the line their democratic aspirations will be realized.

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