



Written by on June 22, 2009

Post-election Unrest Continues in Iran

A *Washington Post* report stated that following a day of calm on Sunday, June 21, several hundred protesters gathered for a vigil Monday at Tehran's Haft-e Tir square. Witnesses said security forces and pro-government militias fired tear gas and beat demonstrators in an effort to break up the protests.

ABC News quoted from an e-mail received from one of the demonstrators:

People are trying to gather in 7 Tir square, but they are being dispersed before they can gather momentum again. I guess the police has found out how to stop rallies before they start. [There are] many many Basiji's [a pro-government paramilitary group].



People between 1,000 to 2,000, they are preventing others from joining them. As soon as they gather somewhere, they attack them, so they run away and regroup again.

Among those arrested over the weekend was Faezeh Rafsanjani, the daughter of former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who had joined with the protestors as a show of support. Her father, who has long been an influential figure in Iranian politics, is a major backer of opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi, who came in second in the recent election. ABC News reported that during the past weekend, Mousavi told his supporters that he is ready to die fighting the regime, and he again called on his supporters to demonstrate peacefully. "Protesting [against] lies and fraud is your right," Mousavi said in a statement.

Throughout this crisis, President Obama has taken a restrained stance and has been reluctant to issue strong criticism of Iran's government — a position that has drawn criticism from some Republicans. Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (S.C.) said on ABC's *This Week*, "Anytime America stands up for freedom, we're better off. When we try to prop up dictators or remain silent, it comes back to bite us."

And Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) said on CNN's *State of the Union*, "If America stands for democracy and all of these demonstrations are going on in Tehran and other cities over there, and people don't think that we really care, then obviously they're going to question: Do we really believe in our principles?"

The White House released a statement by the president on June 20, in which Obama stated, in part:

The Iranian government must understand that the world is watching. We mourn each and every innocent life that is lost. We call on the Iranian government to stop all violent and unjust actions against its own people. The universal rights to assembly and free speech must be respected, and the United States stands with all who seek to exercise those rights.

As I said in Cairo, suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away. The Iranian people will



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ultimately judge the actions of their own government. If the Iranian government seeks the respect of the international community, it must respect the dignity of its own people and govern through consent, not coercion.

The White House also announced on June 22 that Obama would hold a news conference the following day.

Despite the fairly restrained nature of Obama's comments, the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, blamed the United States, as well as Britain, for the crisis and called on both nations to end their interference. Britain's *Guardian* newspaper reported that the Iranian foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottatki, in a speech to foreign diplomats in Tehran, claimed that Iran had faced "an in-flooding of British intelligence officials ahead of the election."

The House of Representatives went farther than the president in condemning Iran, by passing by a 405-1 vote H Res. 560, a resolution "Expressing support for all Iranian citizens who embrace the values of freedom, human rights, civil liberties, and rule of law, and for other purposes."

The resolution was opposed by Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas) who explained his reasons for being the lone dissenting vote in a June 19 statement. Dr. Paul, said, in part:

While I never condone violence, much less the violence that governments are only too willing to mete out to their own citizens, I am always very cautious about "condemning" the actions of governments overseas. As an elected member of the United States House of Representatives, I have always questioned our constitutional authority to sit in judgment of the actions of foreign governments of which we are not representatives. I have always hesitated when my colleagues rush to pronounce final judgment on events thousands of miles away about which we know very little.

I adhere to the foreign policy of our Founders, who advised that we not interfere in the internal affairs of countries overseas. I believe that is the best policy for the United States, for our national security and for our prosperity. I urge my colleagues to reject this and all similar meddling resolutions.

Interestingly, Rep. Paul expressed approval for President Obama's handling of the crisis so far, stating: "I have admired President Obama's cautious approach to the situation in Iran and I would have preferred that we in the House had acted similarly."

Of course, President Obama's and Rep. Paul's motivations in treading lightly on Iran are undoubtedly different. The *Guardian* cited administration officials who "have said Obama has been careful in his response to avoid giving the Iranian government an excuse to portray the protesters as U.S.-backed pawns."

As for Rep. Paul, his position is merely consistent with his longstanding adherence to our Founding Fathers' repeated warnings against getting involved in other nations' quarrels and internal affairs, which, given our current involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, is a policy that looks wiser and wiser in retrospect.



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