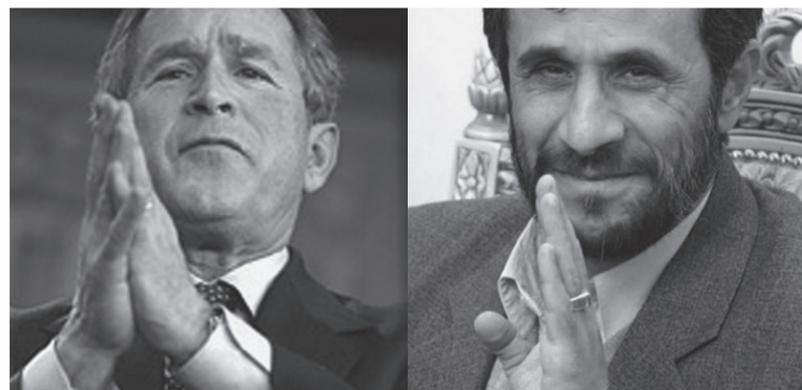


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# Ahmadinejad: Myth and Reality



Over the last few months, as the threat of sanctions and military intervention against Iran has increased, sections of the anti-war movement outside Iran have launched a concerted effort in support of the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. However, inside the country the new government's failure to deliver any of its promises of economic prosperity for the majority of the population has brought nothing more than increased poverty and repression for the working class, women, youth and minorities. Workers face job casualisation and unemployment as the gap between the rich and poor is widening while the government's unprecedented programme of privatisation, accompanied by the systematic non-payment of workers' wages, creates unparalleled levels of poverty and destitution.

Of course Iran's current political strength in the region is a direct consequence of the US/UK invasion of Iraq and the coming to power of a Shia pro-Iran government in Baghdad soon after the 'overthrow' of Iran's other foe, the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, most Iranians do not care about the geo-political manoeuvres of the Islamic regime as their main concerns remain the economic issues inside of the country.

According to the Islamic government's own statistics, 7,467,000 Iranians live below the poverty line, with the poorest sections of the population in the countryside where 9.2% lived with incomes well below the poverty line in the Iranian year 1385 (March 2005-6). In the same year the income of the top 10% earners of the population was 17 times that of the bottom 10%.

Despite populist promises, such as the fair distribution of the oil income, the current Iranian president has presided over one of the most pro-capitalist governments Iran has seen since the launch of the era of 'reconstruction' in 1988, when Iran first accepted IMF loans. Every spring the IMF sends a commission to Tehran to verify the country's compliance with global capital's requirements and every year by mid-summer the Central Bank and the government propose further privatisation in the industrial, banking and service sectors – bringing further misery to tens of thousands of workers, the victims of the subsequent job losses and casualisation. However, the level and scope of privatisation approved this July was so serious that Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, had to 're-interpret' Article 4 of the Islamic republic's constitution. The government's plans to sell off 80% of its stake in a range of state-run industrial companies in the banking, media, transportation and mineral sectors were so far-reaching they amounted to a reversal of one of its own economic 'principles' as declared in the Iranian constitution.

In a country where Islam has been in power for 27 years – where the 'morality police' arrest women for showing a bit of their fringe – prostitution, drug addiction and Aids are widespread. The double standards and hypocrisy on 'moral issues' reminds many Iranians of the opportunist posturing of the regime on the International scene. Iran's Islamic regime whole-heartedly supported the US/UK

military aggression in the area, indeed it benefited considerably from the coming to power of its Shia protégés in the occupation government of Iraq. Furthermore, after all its protestations over the 'right of Iran to develop nuclear technology', the Ahmadinejad government did everything in its power during August-September 2006 to improve its economic and therefore political relations with International Capital.

However, the nuclear crisis has added a new dimension to the internal conflicts within the various factions of the regime, and there are signs that this conflict is moving in a dangerous direction. Iran's Islamic Republic has always been a regime of permanent crises that every now and then lead to an explosive situation, but the current structural crisis is threatening the very existence of the regime: internally it has lost both legitimacy and support amongst its own ranks, and on the international scene it is facing the possibility of sanctions and military threats.

From the day it came to power the regime's many U-turns have revealed a thoroughly-conceived plan of organisational restructuring and policy reversal. However, faced with the current crisis it appears that sections of the regime favour even more strategic solutions.

During the eight years of the previous Khatami presidency the plan to 'reform and liberalise' the powerstructures within the government quite clearly failed, and today many in Iran believe that the regime is left with only one solution, a move from clerical dictatorship to direct religious-military rule. This will accordingly involve restructuring the organs of power by replacing the current ideological forces of repression (Bassij militia, Iranian Hezbollah...) with military and police forces. In addition, the regime will present new definitions regarding the role and the position of senior clerics, where they would become servants of the military apparatus as opposed to its leaders.

The recent trend of relying on a policy of open aggression is a sign that the Iranian regime is retreating to the barracks in order to survive. It reflects how the balance of force within the regime is changing as all policy decisions are subjugated to the power of the conservative elements as they consolidate their leading position.

An open militarisation of all aspects of the political and economical arenas are part of this plan, and Ahmadinejad's budget for March 2006-7 shows clearly the economic implications of this policy. All public and semi-public resources will be redistributed through privatisation. Which plays a crucial role in this plan as it will allow the Passdaran (religious military force) to control all aspects of the country's economy through a network of private companies and institutions associated with those in charge of each section.

It is important to remember that the Passdaran leaders who benefit from unlimited state resources have bought privatised firms in Tehran's bourse (stock exchange) and control the most important sections of the country's industry and import/exports, as well as the communication

and information sector, state contractors, town planning projects and so on.

The unprecedented privatisations planned for the next two years should be evaluated in the light of the current dominance of the Passdaran over the most profitable sections of the economy, as they herald a transfer of power from an executive bureaucracy to a military bureaucracy. Inevitably all this will have serious consequences for Iran.

Over the last few years, every day – and at times more than once a day – workers in Iranian cities and towns have protested not only against the non-payment of wages, but against unemployment, job insecurity and low wages. For most Iranians, Shia Islam in power has become synonymous with corruption, greed and clerics gathering huge fortunes. In Iran they are called the 'Mercedes-driven mullahs', who accumulate huge wealth at the expense of the masses.

Of course the Left inside and outside Iran should oppose any sanctions – as well as limited or protracted war – not only because it is the imperialist countries who call for such measures, but because the main victims of any such action, whether sanctions or war, will be the ordinary people in Iran, most of whom are opposed to the current regime and many of whom have been involved in social and political movements against it. The anti-war movement should also emphasise that inside Iran sanctions will make the rich clerics richer and the poor populace poorer.

Some of the worst periods of repression and mass execution of socialists and communists in Iran took place during the Iran-Iraq war, as the Islamic regime used the conflict as an excuse to unleash terror on its own civilians. However, as we oppose any military action against Iran, we must emphasise we are not therefore supporting the current regime. Our actions must clearly be in defence of ordinary Iranians, and in particular focused on avoiding another period of mass murder by the Shia state of its internal opposition.

The practical solidarity of the anti-war movement should be directed primarily towards the Iranian people and in support of the daily struggles of Iranian workers for the right to survive.