

Green Revolution in Tehran?

The ferment in Iran has little to do with the so-called quest for transparent democracy that TV anchors never tire of mouthing. For, if democracy meant anything to them, they would have allowed it to thrive in Algeria and occupied Palestine.

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THE on-going post-electoral turmoil in Iran is hardly unusual in developing countries, and has precedence in Eurasia, the world's new-found hydro-carbon-rich region. It may be recalled that the US-led transatlantic community bequeathed similar turbulence when it helped foment in Georgia and Ukraine the glorified names such as the Orange Revolution, Rose Revolution, and so forth.

Iran, though projecting the West's problems in the Middle East, is in fact a greater source of discomfort to its detractors because of its enormous influence in the Eurasian region. What is being televised from Tehran today is of a piece with the orchestrated move that has changed the definition of sovereignty also in other parts of Eurasia from Belgrade to Kiev and beyond -- the area

now considered the lynchpin for world domination.

In this connection, it is worth listening to President Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, the man responsible for starting the related business of "jihad" in Afghanistan. Here are his concerns published in Foreign Affairs (September-October 1997):

"Eurasia is home to most of the world's politically assertive and dynamic states. All the historical pretenders to global power originated in Eurasia. The world's most populous aspirants to regional hegemony, China and India, are in Eurasia, as are all the potential political or economic challengers to US primacy. After the United States, the next six largest economies and military spenders are there, as are all but one of the world's overt nuclear powers, and all but one of the covert

ones. Eurasia accounts for 75% of the world's population, 60% of its GNP, and 75% of its energy resources. Collectively, Eurasia's potential power overshadows even America's. What happens with distribution of power on Eurasian land mass will be of decisive importance to America's global primacy."

Brzezinski's observation, though more than a decade old, points to the stakes involved for the West, which is genuinely anxious over the re-election of a hard-liner in the Iranian election -- particularly after infuriating both the US and its strategic ally in the Middle East, Israel, in the very first term of his presidency.

The US had also been a close ally of the Shah's Iran which was a pillar in the former's twin pillars of security (the other being Saudi Arabia) in the strategic region of the Gulf. Aware of her limitations in realising its agenda in Middle East without Iran, a regional power in the making, the US is eager to re-establish its old ties with an Iran ruled by moderates and on her own terms. That's at the heart of the brouhaha created over Iran's electoral result.

The ferment in Iran has little to do with the so-called quest for transparent

democracy that TV anchors never tire of mouthing. For, if democracy meant anything to them, they would have allowed it to thrive in Algeria and occupied Palestine, where the popular will was by a bizarre global consensus trampled.

To the West, no inconvenient democracy can be welcome for obvious reasons. Nor strangely enough does the Iranian strife identify a verifiable Western candidate although former premier, Mir Mousavi is projected as one.

Mousavi faces limited choices: either the full force of the Iranian state will now crush him or his presumed supporters would discard him a bit later. Neither course allows for a further test of the much-hyped popular will.

His fate bears a striking similarity to that of Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia. He became the West's new-found mascot, as long as he helped the breaking up of the Soviet Union. But when his turn came, he was thrown into oblivion just as cynically. The "popular" coup against him was named the Rose Revolution.

The real power-play being witnessed in Iran has nothing to do with an agreeable candidate for the West. The forces arrayed against



Who ultimately benefits from the political turmoil in Iran?

Ahmednejad, i.e. those of Mousavi, Khatami, and Rafsanjani, had been in the vanguard of Islamic revolution and ruled Iran in succession in different capacities. They all were perforce anti-West, although their degree of opposition to the West could have been different

at different times.

It is already difficult to tell precisely at what point of their metamorphosis one of them becomes "moderate," and thus acceptable to the West

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America's first Muslim president?

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FOR recession bailout packages and publicly funded competing health insurance proposal providing insurance to the 47 million uninsured Americans he's been dubbed a socialist/communist. For environmental carbon emission "cap and trade" policy he's been called a radical. For non-hawkish and non-antagonistic foreign policy stance he's been called an apologetic appeaser to America's critics and adversaries. And now a new epithet -- America's Muslim President.

In a June 9 commentary, captioned "America's first Muslim president: Obama aligns with the policies of Shariah-adherents," Frank Gaffney (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence in the Reagan Administration), wrote: "During his White House years, William Jefferson Clinton [...] was dubbed 'America's first black president' by a black admirer. Applying the standard of identity politics and pandering to a special interest that earned Mr. Clinton that distinction, Barack Hussein Obama would have to be considered America's first Muslim president."

"This is not to say, necessarily, that Mr. Obama actually is a Muslim any more than Mr. Clinton actually is black. After his five months in office, and most especially after his just-concluded visit to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, however, a stunning conclusion seems increasingly plausible: The man now happy to have his Islamic-rooted middle name featured prominently has engaged in the most consequential bait-and-switch since Adolf Hitler duped Neville Chamberlain over Czechoslovakia at Munich."

What Gaffney is really up to is revealed in his following statement. Referring to Obama's Kenyan Muslim father, a few years of Obama's childhood schooling in Indonesia, and the June 4 Cairo speech, Gaffney writes: There is mounting evidence that the president not only identifies with Muslims, but actually may still be one himself.

Obama's statements, "I have known Islam on three continents before coming to the region where it was first revealed. [...] I'm looking forward to the day when Jerusalem is a secure and lasting home for Jews and Christians and Muslims"



What's in a name?

have pushed the supercilious neo-cons in state of near paroxysm (See "politicconomy.com" for the article link -- a must read piece to diagnose the deranged mind of a neo-con).

"Particularly worrying is the realignment Mr. Obama has announced in US policy toward Israel. While he pays lip service to the "unbreakable" bond between America and the Jewish state, the president has unmistakably signalled that he intends to compel the Israelis to make territorial and other strategic concessions to Palestinians to achieve the hallowed two-state solution. In doing so, he ignores the inconvenient fact that both the Brotherhoods Hamas and Abu Mazen's Fatah remain determined to achieve a one-state solution, whereby the Jews will be driven "into the sea."

So, it's all about Israel and the Jewish interest. Frank Gaffney, founder and President of the Center for Security Policy in Washington DC, is in the same company with former Vice President Dick Cheney, and the neo conservatives

such as former deputy defence secretary Paul Wolfowitz, former UN ambassador John Bolton, to name a few. Although, they're voiceless in the Obama administration, they have Fox TV Channel, conservative print media and blogs. For example, Gaffney -- a caterwauling columnist -- writes for the Washington Times, the National Review Online, WorldNetDaily, and Jewish World Review.

I have no problem with people being Jewish, Christian or of other religious pedigree. But Gaffney isn't the same type of Jewish intellectual as my nuclear engineering master's thesis chairman, Professor Erphaim Staim, or my economics Ph.D adviser, Professor Rubin Saposnik, or my colleague and co-researcher Steven Hayworth.

The neo-cons are infuriated with Obama for his somewhat even handed policy towards the two state solutions to the intractable age old Israel-Palestinian and a wider Arab-Israeli conflict. They're accustomed to a US President openly haranguing Israeli Prime Minister to "stop expansion of illegitimate" settlements as a precondition to any peace negotiation with the Palestinians. They're so bête noire that Obama's reference to "Palestine" instead of Palestinian territory, "extremists" instead of "terrorists" when referred to Hamas, Fatah, and Hezbollah, and finally "Muslim World" instead of Muslim countries in his Cairo speech, have made them befuddled.

The neo-cons and the right-wing

Republicans went berserk seeing that the Iranian "theocracy" didn't crumble during the post presidential election reform movements. Some conservative lawmakers even called Obama "timid and weak" for his lack of outright condemnation of the Iranian theocrats and support for the opposition candidate Mir Mousavi-led anti-government protests. They're fumed because Obama is ending American occupation of Iraq and embarked on closing down the infamous Guantanamo torture prison. Most outrageous yet is their outcry to have America either bomb Iranian nuclear installations or equip Israel with nuclear bunker buster with the "go-ahead" green light to decimate Iranian nuclear installations.

The neo-cons would like nothing less than America bombing every Muslim country that challenges Israel's Zionist expansionary policy. They'd like to see Israel's Muslim enemies self-destruct -- Hamas vs Fatah in Palestine, Shia vs Sunni in Iraq, mullahs vs reformers in Iran, and so on. Unfortunately, the leaders of the Middle East see things only inward. As Obama claimed in his Cairo speech, these leaders would say one thing privately and a different thing overtly.

My observation -- no matter what soubriquet one labels President Obama with -- he is probably the last best hope for a peaceful and negotiated resolution of the Israel-Palestine homeland issue and the wider Arab-Israeli conflicts.

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India should combine tough climate stand with green policy

India has been at the sidelines of the climate negotiations. But India cannot sit a climate crisis out. India must help build the levees, and plan for the gathering storm. The new government has a clear mandate, and with it comes the chance to implement an ambitious, domestic low-carbon policy.

NANDAN NILEKANI

THE emergence of a Congress Party-led coalition government with a comfortable majority could not have been better timed. A government with a strong mandate is

well placed to define India's long-term strategy towards climate change, and to call for the steps that the nation needs to take at the Copenhagen climate summit scheduled for December.

These climate negotiations are easily the most complex collaborative effort

the world has undertaken, and India is being asked to sign on to the deal being worked out at Copenhagen. India is likely to be among the most affected by coming climate shifts. The Indian government rightly points out that the burden of cutting carbon emissions should lie with the developed nations responsible for the accumulated levels of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere.

The opening sessions to the Copenhagen negotiations have indicated that developed nations that were early holdouts from Kyoto may eventually sign the climate deal. But as the deadline for an agreement nears, developed country targets and planned carbon-reducing strategies are falling victim to local politics.

In Europe, the largesse in carbon trading permits to industries has allowed them to pollute at rock-bottom prices. The developing world's unwillingness to take on caps has also become a defence for groups opposed to emission cuts. In US, the Waxman-Markey carbon bill is facing opposition from those who argue that without India and China's participation, US curbs will have no overall impact.

The big question for India is how it can reconcile its own goals with the aim of building an effective global climate deal. One way is for India to reiterate a commitment that was pledged at the G8 Heiligendamm summit in June 2007: India will not exceed, between now and 2050, the per capita emissions of developed nations.

This pledge to keep its per capita emissions below the industrialised world is a significant one: with 60-80% emission cuts planned by 2050, devel-

oped nations would bring down their emissions from the current range of 10-20 tonnes per head to less than four tonnes per capita. This means that India will have to limit emissions to no more than twice its current level of two tonnes per capita. India has committed to growth as a low carbon economy.

India cannot be expected to take on binding emission cuts over and above this commitment. It is only fair that Western nations take responsibility for the accumulation of GHGs over the last century. Independent assessments support this view that India should stay away from mandatory cuts. They've shown that even with rapid growth, it will still remain among the least carbon intensive countries in the next few decades. Besides, much of India's future emission growth will come from providing essential energy services to its population.

Another aspect the country should focus on is ensuring financial flows and technology transfers from developed nations to the developing world, for climate mitigation and adaptation. This is literally a hundred billion dollar issue. But this has long been a sore point for Indian negotiators.

The proposals of assistance from developed nations have fallen far short of what India needs. Besides financing, India must insist on programs tailored to its economic needs. An emphasis on fairness also means that developed countries refrain from imposing carbon tariffs on exports from India.

While taking a firm stand in international negotiations, India has to take a closer look at its domestic approach to climate change. The growing concern among Indian environmental activists

is that the government's stance globally is colouring its local environmental efforts. "The defence of our emissions internationally has been long used to justify apathy towards controlling pollution in India," the Indian environmentalist Sharad Lele told me. This attitude ignores the increasing negative impact of pollution on India's agriculture, urbanisation and economic growth. It is becoming clear that the traditional, carbon-intensive model of growth will not work here for long -- we have to embrace a low-carbon approach.

In 2008, India's Congress Party-led government put in place a National Action Plan on Climate Change, which emphasised renewable energy, adaptation and greater energy efficiency. Now returned to power, the government has the chance to intensify these efforts. This includes low-pain measures such as zero tariffs on low emission products, and tax exemptions for clean energy investments. More ambitious policy could include a smart grid through which people can both buy and sell excess energy, and efficiency and pollution standards that nudge industry towards greener choices.

They have already tabled plans to account for the depletion of natural resources while calculating India's GDP. However, India has been reticent when it comes to ambitious attempts at controlling pollution and emissions, on the concern that it will hurt its economy.

In doing so, the country may have overlooked the opportunities that come with a pro-environmental policy. The burden of pollution has fallen disproportionately on the poor. Over 80% of India's rural poor depend on the coun-

try's degraded common lands and water, and on its declining forests. For India's legislators a low-carbon approach ought to then be an overriding interest.

Such a low-carbon approach doesn't have to be anti-development, it can both deepen and expand India's markets by incorporating these communities into them. Regulation that requires the industry to offset carbon-intensive projects with green investments can incorporate people on common lands into such projects, paying them for planting trees and maintaining forested land. This approach would create new wealth within these communities.

Other countries have already demonstrated that pollution does not have to be an inevitable accompaniment to industrialisation. Two decades ago, acid rain was a growing problem in the country. But an innovative system introduced during the 1990s allowed utilities to trade credits for sulfur dioxide emissions, and since then, acid rain in the US has been cut by more than half.

Until now, India has been at the sidelines of the climate negotiations. But India cannot sit a climate crisis out. India must help build the levees, and plan for the gathering storm. The new government has a clear mandate, and with it comes the chance both to define a powerful role for India over the next six months in global climate negotiations and to implement an ambitious, domestic low-carbon policy.

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