

Obama: US “meddling” in Iran should not be seen

By Bill Van Auken
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Amid rhetoric about his commitment to the “universal values” of democratic processes and free speech, US President Barack Obama made one unintentionally revealing statement on Iran Tuesday. “It’s not productive, given the history of the US-Iranian relationship, to be seen as meddling,” he said.

The statement was meant as an explanation of the Obama administration’s failure to join the Iranian opposition led by the defeated candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi in explicitly denouncing last Friday’s presidential election as a “fraud” and as a defense against criticism from the Republican right in the US.

Before Obama made the statement, his Republican opponent in the 2008 election, Arizona Senator John McCain condemned the administration’s reticence, declaring that Obama “should speak out that this is a corrupt, flawed sham of an election and that the Iranian people have been deprived of their rights.”

Obama’s choice of words, however, spoke volumes. The US should not “*be seen* as meddling”; as for the meddling itself, that is clearly another matter.

The president’s reference to “the history of the US-Iranian relationship” refers to the 1953 CIA-backed coup that overthrew the country’s nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq, who two years earlier had begun to nationalize Iran’s oil industry, until then controlled by Britain.

The coup ushered in the 26-year, US-backed rule of the Shah and SAVAK, his brutal secret police, which ended only with the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Nearly one year after the coup, in August 1954, the *New York Times* published an editorial succinctly explaining the motives behind the CIA action: “Underdeveloped countries with rich resources now have an object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid by one of their number which goes berserk with fanatical nationalism,” the paper editorialized. “It is perhaps too much to hope that Iran’s experience will prevent the rest of Mossadeqs in other countries, but that experience may at least strengthen the hands of more reasonable and far-seeing leaders.”

The obvious question is: what fundamentally has changed in “the US-Iranian relationship” since those days? Washington—under Obama as under Bush—is continuing two colonial-style wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, i.e., on Iran’s western and eastern borders, that have claimed the lives of over one million people. The aim of these wars is the same as the objective of the coup of 1953—control of “rich resources” and the pipeline routes for extracting them from the oil-rich Persian Gulf and

Central Asia.

Behind the statements of concern about the elections and the subsequent repression in Iran, US imperialism is prepared to carry out even greater crimes against the Iranian people.

Washington does not want to be seen as playing a direct role in seeking to destabilize the Iranian government for fear that it would provoke a popular backlash because of this history. While US agencies work covertly, the Obama administration leaves the direct propaganda operations to the press and to its European allies.

The most prominent role has been played by the *New York Times*, the same newspaper that was decisive in promoting the phony “weapons of mass destruction” pretext for the war against Iraq. In 1953, the *Times* not merely endorsed the coup in Iran editorially; through its correspondent, Kennett Love, it worked intimately with those who organized it.

In the current crisis, without citing any objective evidence, the *Times* reported as fact the Iranian opposition’s claims that the election was rigged, that the 62.6 percent victory declared for incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was impossible and that Mousavi had been the real victor. This version of events has generally been echoed by the rest of the media.

Also serving as propaganda agents for US imperialism’s destabilization operation in Iran are the pseudo-lefts around the *Nation* magazine, which under the Obama administration has emerged every bit as much a house organ of US imperialism as the *Times* itself. On Wednesday it posted an article by its foreign policy correspondent Robert Dreyfuss, who acknowledged, “I’m biased. I support the Green Revolution,” referring to the forces gathered behind Mousavi.

He then went on to portray these forces in fairly objective terms. “The anti-Ahmadinejad coalition is deep and broad,” he wrote. “It includes conservative, Old Guard founders of the Islamic Republic, who view Ahmadinejad with disdain ...; the large and growing majority of Iranian clerics and senior ayatollahs, many of whom have long viewed the Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as an upstart and usurper ...; nearly the entirety of Iran’s business class, especially those involved in high-tech, aviation, oil and gas, and heavy industry, who blame Ahmadinejad for his catastrophic mismanagement of the economy” as well as so-called “reformists” like former President Khatami and Mousavi, and “the educated elite.”

What is described here are the wealthiest and most privileged

layers of Iranian society, which together constitute a decisive layer of the country's ruling political establishment. What is noticeably missing from this "coalition" is the working class and the rural poor, the overwhelming majority of the Iranian population.

In all of the giddy commentary in the media about a "twitter revolution," there has been no suggestion by anyone that Mousavi enjoys the support of the workers and the most oppressed layers of Iranian society.

What is the Obama administration attempting to accomplish with its covert intervention—loudly promoted by its erstwhile "liberal" and "left" supporters—in the Iranian election?

It is not aiming for "regime change" along the lines of Iraq. Certain lessons have been learned from the Bush administration's debacle, most critically that disbanding the military and the security forces in a country targeted for US domination is a fatal mistake. These are the forces upon which imperialism must rely for imposing policies that will spell intensified oppression for the majority of the population and for suppressing any genuine revolutionary movement of the masses.

What Washington wants is to effect a change in personnel at the top of the Iranian regime that would bring about a change in policy favoring US geo-strategic interests in Iran and the surrounding region. In Mousavi and those backing him, the Obama administration sees the possibility of shifting Tehran toward more open collaboration in its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while promoting "free market" economic policies that would open up the country for exploitation by US-based oil conglomerates and other transnationals.

The reasons for Washington's apparent caution is not just the history of US-Iranian relations, but also the fear that the fissures within the ruling circles in Iran and the mobilizations in the streets could get out of hand. Despite their size, the mass demonstrations in Tehran and elsewhere have been dominated by the better-off and better-educated sectors of Iranian society. If broader social forces were to come into struggle against the government, and Mousavi, his billionaire backer Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and others in the ruling establishment were to lose control, the US could face the threat of a new Iranian Revolution.

It is for this more fundamental struggle that Iranian workers, students and youth must prepare. The present political confrontation is taking place within a narrow circle of the Iranian ruling elite, whose interests and aspirations are totally at odds with those of Iranian working people. Neither the repressive right-wing demagogue Ahmadinejad nor the well-heeled "reformers" around Mousavi offer any way forward for the working class.

Students and other sections of the population seeking a means to fight the socially and politically repressive regime of Ahmadinejad can place no confidence in Mousavi, who was himself responsible for the most savage repression when he was prime minister throughout the 1980s, or Rafsanjani, whose name is synonymous with wealth, privilege and corruption.

It is vitally important to learn the lessons of the tragedies suffered by the Iranian working class in both 1953 and 1979 so that they are not repeated. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the mass struggles of Iranian workers dominated the political life of the country. In 1978 and 1979, the struggles of the Iranian

workers, most importantly the oil workers who shut down the most crucial section of the country's economy, were the decisive force in bringing down the hated regime of the Shah.

In both periods, however, the Stalinist Tudeh Party worked to subordinate these struggles to sections of the bourgeoisie. In the first instance it was to the anti-communist nationalist politician Mossadeq, who called out the army to suppress demonstrations against the Shah's return before he himself was overthrown by the CIA. In the second, it was to the reactionary clerical elements represented by Ayatollah Khomeini, who after coming to power unleashed savage repression against the left.

Today, the Tudeh Party is a shadow of its former self. But it and its successor groups are playing the same role, seeking to convince students and youth that the struggle against the Ahmadinejad regime can be "outsourced" to Mousavi and Co.

This perspective can only lead to new defeats and another round of bloody repression. What is required is the development of an independent socialist program for the mobilization of the most decisive layers of Iranian society—the working class in the leadership of the oppressed masses—in revolutionary struggle.

Anyone who claims that an independent revolutionary movement of the Iranian workers is impossible and that backing one faction of the ruling establishment against another is the more "practical" approach is deliberately ignoring the profound revolutionary traditions of the Iranian working class.

The class lines must be drawn. Workers must advance their own independent program in defense of jobs, living standards and democratic rights, organizing popular assemblies to fight for these demands. They must link their struggles to those of the working class in the rest of the Middle East as well as Western Europe, America and internationally in order to defeat imperialism and the Iranian bourgeoisie.

This requires the building of a new revolutionary party of the working class as the Iranian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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