



IRAN DEMOCRACY MONITOR

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Radicalism and Reform in Islamic Republic of Iran

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Iran; Latin America; Russia

IRAN'S REFORMISTS, MUGGED BY REALITY

Once hopeful of reclaiming their former influence in the national legislature, Iran's beleaguered reformist political camp is now defining its political prospects downward ahead of next month's parliamentary elections. "We had concluded that we could compete for one-third of the 290 seats, but unfortunately... even under the best scenario we can now compete for only 10 percent of the seats," Abdollah Nasser, a spokesman for the umbrella group of reformist parties now preparing for the March 15th run-off, has admitted. Nasser's glum prognosis stems from the fact that Iran's interior ministry – responsible for vetting potential candidates for parliament – initially opted to bar more than 2,000 (mostly reformist) prospective lawmakers, including the grandson of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Ali Eshraghi, from running.

Widespread domestic condemnation has forced the Iranian government to soften its stance a bit in recent days, allowing the recertification of a number of those candidates, including Eshraghi. At least one reformist politician, however, still sees the writing on the wall. "One plan that appeals to many in power is to create the impression of *Äçä*, *Ä½* genuinely competitive elections," Mohsen Armin, a leader of the Mojahedin-e Enghelab-e Eslami party, has told reporters. "This allows them to hold engineered competitions with *Äçä*, *Ä½* predetermined results within the frameworks that is [sic] acceptable to them." (Agence France Presse, February 7, 2008; Tehran *Rooz*, February 24, 2008)

MORE IRANIAN MOVES IN LATIN AMERICA

The Islamic Republic is poised to dramatically expand its outreach in the Western Hemisphere. Official media sources report that the Iranian government is planning to launch a new media offensive "for all of Latin America." The initiative, which will take the form of a television station based in the foothills of the Andes mountains in Bolivia, is intended to promote Iranian solidarity with "the great struggle of [the region's] peasant movement," said Bolivian President Evo Morales in formally unveiling the plan. (Tehran *Fars*, February 19, 2008)

HOW CLOSE IS IRAN TO THE BOMB?

Back in December, the U.S. intelligence community threw American policy toward Iran into disarray with its claims that Iran had stopped working on nuclear weapons and most likely would only be "technically capable of producing enough (highly enriched uranium) for a weapon sometime during the 2010-2015 timeframe." But now, Washington's allies across the Atlantic have come to a rather different – and more troubling – conclusion.

A computer simulation carried out in recent weeks by the European Union's Joint Research Centre, based in Italy, has found that Iran could have enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon as soon as the end of this year. The experiment in question tested the likely performance of centrifuges such as those known to be operating in Iran. Based upon its projections, Iran's current centrifuge cascades – if operating at 100 percent efficiency – would yield the necessary fissile material for a bomb by the end of 2008. Even if they operate at a much lower rate – just 25 percent efficiency – the Iranian regime would still have the requisite amount of highly enriched uranium by 2010, far sooner than envisioned by American estimates. (Hamburg *Der Spiegel*, February 21, 2008)

ENTER MOSCOW

Iran's efforts to expand its international energy profile just got a major shot in the arm. On February 19th, Russia's powerful natural gas monopoly, Gazprom, formally announced plans to begin substantial additional work in Iran's giant South Pars gas field. For the past decade, Gazprom has been developing two phases of South Pars in partnership with France's Total and Malaysia's Petronas. But the new deal just struck between Gazprom and Tehran includes major additional work by the Russian state conglomerate, as well as related Russian investments in oil production projects in Iran. The move amounts to a major blow to American efforts to isolate Iran internationally on account of its nuclear program. (Reuters, February 20, 2008)