

# Ahmedinajad and the anti-imperialism of fools

Monday 13 July 2009, by [SULEHRIA Farooq](#) (Date first published: 10 July 2009).

A columnist in the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* told his readers on the day of election in Iran: "If you have friends in Iran, try to convince them to vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad today. There is no one who will serve Israel's PR interests better than him." (12 June 2009)

It seems Israelis haven't many Iranian friends. Or perhaps Israeli advice wasn't heeded. Hence election procedures were doctored and results slightly engineered, but not in view of Israel's PR interests. The holy rigging on June 12 was a celestial act to stave off Big Satan. This was nothing new—except for the mass demonstrations across Iran that followed. Ironically, the mass mobilizations have troubled some left progressives more than the Ayatollahs themselves. Declaring the mass mobilization a CIA-backed "color revolution," these Shari-progressives have sided with Mahmood Ahmedinejad. After all, he is an anti-American, anti-Israel—hence anti-imperialist. This over-simplified anti-imperialist description of Mahmood Ahmedinejad—based on purposely sensational statements—does not take into account:

1. That Ahmedinejad's re-election is not a break but a continuation of the regime. In Mohammad Khatami (president from 1999-2005), the Iranian regime found its Nikita Khrushchev. Ahmedinejad proved himself Iran's Leonid Brezhnev, who rehabilitated Joseph Stalin (though with one difference. Brezhnev rehabilitated Stalin—minus the purges. Ahmedinejad reimposed the restrictions eased under Khatami's regime).
2. That the Iranian regime's opposition to Israel is mere hypocrisy is historically self evident. Most blatant was the arms deal Iran contracted with Israel, behind the back of the Palestinians, during Iraq-Iran war. Support to Hezbollah or Hamas, reflects the regional political milieu. Support for Hezbollah and many other Shia groups (TNFJ in Pakistan for instance) is based on sectarian grounds. Hamas is an exception owing to a lack of viable Shia project in Palestine. Thirdly, owing to the strong solidarity prevalent across the Muslim world, every Muslim dictator vows to liberate "Palestinian brothers." Yet the Iranian government showed little concern for Afghani refugees. Badly treated for two decades in Iran, they were then forcibly expelled. Ironically, but justifiably, the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* quoted a foreign ministry official's description of Ahmadinejad as "the best thing that ever happened to us."
3. That Iran lent tactical support to the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan (in order to rid itself of the hostile, anti-Shia Taliban on its eastern border) and Iraq (to get rid of arch-enemy Saddam Hussein), hardly moves of an anti-imperialist government. True, it was during the Mohammad Khatami's presidency that the USA occupied these countries, but this policy of collaboration has continued during Ahmedinejad's period.
4. That the Ayatollahs (along with the House of Saud, which supported and promoted Wahabist groups), by fostering and patronizing Shia groups in other Muslim countries, have divided the Muslim world along sectarian lines, thus undercutting working-class and resistance struggles. In fact this religious sectarianism has weakened the anti-imperialist forces.

5. That sections of left are now finding radical aspects about the Ayatollahs is recent. When this regime was established, the left all across the world was united in declaring it a reactionary regime. For the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, both the USSR and the USA constituted infidel enemies.

6. That the economic policies of this regime, like that of the pro-US Saudi dictatorship, serve the interests of imperialism. Iran applied for the WTO in 1996' talks started in 2005. Coincidentally, Saudi Arabia became a WTO member in 2005.

Not merely is Ahmedinejad's anti-Americanism, anti-Israel policy highly questionable but declaring him an anti-imperialist blatantly trivializes anti-imperialism.

Anti-imperialism stands for — as anti-imperialism should — liberation. It is liberation for all the exploited, from all sorts of exploitation. Anti-imperialism includes national liberation, women's emancipation, democratization, political and economic empowerment, respect for religious minorities, and self-determination for oppressed nationalities. Anti-imperialism is freedom for all oppressed, from all oppression.

In contrast, Ahmedinejad, or Osama ben Laden for that matter, offer an anti-imperialism that does not tolerate these values. Theirs is an anti-imperialism that chokes minorities, strangles smaller nationalities and reduces women to bodies-sans-minds hidden under thick burkas.

One cannot be a liberator and an oppressor at the same time. The anti-imperialism that upholds Ahmedinejad as its poster boy does not solve this contradiction. We have seen this anti-imperialism in Afghanistan under the Taliban where it was reduced to the burka and massacre of minorities. Al-Qaeda is the non-state portrayal of this brand of anti-imperialism: bombings, kidnappings, hijackings.

The anti-imperialism currently on display in the Muslim world is symbolic and not of substance. It signifies a new phase in the relationship between two estranged lovers, fundamentalism and imperialism. It is the product of the process run by imperialism in collaboration with fundamentalism, to eliminate genuine anti-imperialism in the Muslim world.

In the Muslim world, it used to be radical nationalists, socialists and communists — until they were eliminated — who epitomized anti-imperialism. Nasser of Egypt, Sukarno of Indonesia, Mossadeq of Iran and Bhutto of Pakistan: all these names embodied anti-imperialism in the Muslim world for four decades.

These towering personalities of the Muslim world did not fall from the skies. They were products of a radicalized period. Indonesia had the largest communist party (PKI) outside the then communist world. With PKI backing him, Sukarno dared host the Bandung Conference. Kassem in Iraq opted out of the Baghdad Pact because he knew the Iraqi Communist Party, the largest communist party in Arab world, supported him. Mossadeq dared nationalize oil, certain of support from Iran's Tudeh party. Having humbled pro-US military dictator Ayub Khan, the Pakistani masses voted the "socialist" Bhutto to power. It was this confidence that enabled Bhutto to run a relatively independent foreign policy, introduce land reforms and nationalization.

This cream of the crop of the Muslim world, in a polarized cold war era, endangered the structures that imperialism had carefully built and ruthlessly maintained. This secular nationalist leadership and its communist backers had to be eliminated.

Mossadeq was overthrown in 1953. The CIA removed this Iranian aristocrat, a direct descendant of Qajar dynasty, in collaboration with Iranian religious elements. The CIA spent five million dollars to help the pro-West mullahs rent a mob, restoring the Shah of Iran to the throne.

Indonesia and Iraq underwent bloodbaths almost simultaneously. A military-mullah-CIA troika massacred a million people in Indonesia, with lists provided by the CIA. Soldiers in collaboration with young Nahdlatul Ulema's bearded volunteers unleashed a "jihad" against "red devils" across the archipelago. In Iraq, the Baath party did the dirty work (first in 1963, then 1967-68), since the religious elements commanded almost no support in a country striving for a socialist revolution.

A decade later, an example was made out of Bhutto. A khaki-green mullah-military alliance, backed once again by the CIA, sent him to the gallows. Meanwhile, Anwar Sadaat effectively rolled back the Nasser-era process in Egypt by granting full freedom to the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad. The case of Afghanistan is too fresh for memory to need much jogging: Osama was brought from Saudi Arabia to oust Dr Najib's secular government.

In all these cases, there is a clear connivance between fundamentalism and imperialism. With radical nationalist leaders dead and communist or socialist parties eliminated, the political arena was wide open for Imam Khomeini, Osama bin Laden, Mullah Muhammad Omar or their local clones.

What does the current quasi-anti-imperialist crop have to offer: occupation of a US embassy, an attack on the World Trade Centre, blasts in Madrid and elsewhere, the razing of Buddha statues? These acts of "anti-imperialism" might cause a temporary headache for the residents of White House and Empire's satraps in London, Paris and Berlin. But this headache is nothing compared to the frustration of Washington when radical nationalists dare to nationalize their countries resources, or carry out land reform. Incidentally, this is Washington's reaction not just for the Muslim world, but in Latin America and the Caribbean as well.

An anti-imperialism that does not threaten to nationalize oil (Osama declares that oil is an asset owned by Arabs but opposes its common ownership), stand for land distribution or allow the working classes to organize trade unions — such "anti-imperialism" does not bother the Empire. It is an anti-imperialism based on the repression of women, religious minorities, small nationalities, trade unions, peasant organizations, and political parties. Thus it actually functions to carry imperialism's needs: repression of the masses.

It is countries that oppress their masses and lack trade unions and workers' parties that best suit multinationals. The so-called anti-imperialism of these religious forces thus actually serves imperialism in the current global scenario. It is, at best, the anti-imperialism of fools.

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\*From Farooq Sulehria's ZSpace:

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