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Iranian Vulnerability

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It will not take the Iranian religious regime long to contain and break up the current protest movement and put an end to its political and social effects – even if the task does not seem easy. It will also rapidly gain back its “unified” discourse in facing the pelting offers of the West to change its conduct.

Although US President Obama considered it ineffectual to give his opinion on the results of the Iranian elections in light of the history of troubled relations between the two countries, it is obvious that the call for dialogue he addressed some months ago to Tehran constituted a launching pad for the moderate conservatives and reformists to impose a change halfway. This is especially true since he linked this dialogue with the end of the elections and the clarification of the Iranian trends, in an unannounced bet on Ahmadinejad’s defeat.

With no doubt, the head of the Iranian authority Khamenei immediately understood the meaning of the US invitation and the danger it poses on his regime. He voted in advance, announcing his absolute support for Ahmadinejad, moving away from the role he is keen to have – that of a sponsor to all Iranians, regardless of their affiliations. He then commended the election results before their official confirmation. The last thing the wali faqih needs is for the elections to produce a political force with a broad popular base that would impose – or try to impose – its participation in taking the strategic decisions linked to Iran’s international relations and its regional alliances as well as its role and influence in the region spreading from the borders of China to Morocco. This is in addition to discussing the executive decisions related to the daily lives of Iranians and their economy, with what this entails in terms of violating its awe.

Before Obama, the division inside the Iranian regime did not seem so great. No one imagined that it might yield such bloody confrontations and demonstrations raising the slogans of “Death to the Dictator,” which are reminiscent of the late Shah’s last days. What happened surprised everyone and confused even Khamenei himself, who had to back off, albeit apparently and temporarily, from the “sanctity” of the announced results.

Before Obama, no Iranian party dared to discuss publicly the rightfulness of the political and financial support offered by the regime to Hezbollah and Hamas, which are its “pride” and represent the symbol of its power and its way out of its national and sectarian isolation. They also represent its winning card in the “tug-of-war” with Israel, the United States and the West in general, and with the Arab world in particular, and in the internal mobilization it needs to prove its immunity to international changes, in particular the new US policy in its attempt to settle the Palestinian issue based on the two-state solution. The regime showed that it is in constant need of tension on this or that front in order to reach a regional decision and encourage and sponsor divisions; and that calmness, stability, and reduced hostility make it vulnerable.

But whatever the way the regime chooses to deal with this partial and sudden loss of control on the internal front - especially that it has various effective security tools it hasn't resorted to yet - its great image has been affected. Whether it enters into negotiations with the Europeans or a dialogue with the Americans on its pending issues, especially its nuclear ambitions, or whether it refrains from doing this for various reasons and pretexts, the regime won't be able from now on to claim it had the absolute support of the Iranians. Its symbols won't be able to continue relying on internal cohesion and demand participation in solving global problems while blood flows in the streets of their capital.