
US-Iran Program Update Summer 2005

US-IRAN RELATIONS:

On June 25, former Tehran mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected president of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ahmadinejad's come from behind in the first round was a surprise to many, and he easily defeated former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the run-off election with approximately 62.2 percent of the vote to Rafsanjani's 35.3 percent. Reformist candidate Mehdi Karroubi trailed in third. Approximately 23 million votes were cast - nearly 49 percent of Iran's eligible voters.

After eight years of cautious liberalization under Mohammed Khatami, it is not yet clear what direction the new government will take in domestic and international affairs. Ahmadinejad is expected to announce his cabinet nominations in early August. He initially challenged western leaders by vowing to resist international pressure to abandon the country's nuclear program. However, he moved to calm concerns about his hard-line politics, vowing to "avoid any extremism inside the government" and to pursue "a policy of moderation." He stated that rivals had distorted his views and that foreign policy decisions under his administration would continue to be reached by consensus.

US government officials expressed concern with the election results and questioned the fairness of the vote.

In other news, Iran renewed its pledge not to seek nuclear weapons during talks in May with Britain, France, and Germany. The EU-3 called the talks after Iran threatened to resume suspended nuclear activities including uranium enrichment. While Iran had earlier warned of the possibility of deadlock in the negotiations, the EU-3 agreed to provide Iran a detailed proposal by August on implementing the Paris Accords. European officials have stated they are prepared to join the US in referring Iran to the UN Security Council if it resumes enrichment.

Following Iran's decision to maintain suspension and continue negotiations, the World Trade Organization announced it would begin membership talks with Iran. While the US dropped its opposition to Iran joining the body, accession can take many years.

PROJECT UPDATES:

Education

SFCG is working together with Tehran's Art University and Oberlin College to arrange a music exchange between American and Iranian student musicians. Oberlin's renowned Jasper Quartet is planning to travel to Tehran with SFCG in late October 2005 to give performances at various universities and engage directly with Iranian music students. Oberlin College President Nancy Dye and faculty from the college's Conservatory of Music will also participate in the trip. The International Society for Iranian Culture (ISIC) in New York is assisting with the visa process.

Astronauts

SFCG postponed the exchange to Iran of former American astronauts due to the June presidential elections. We are hopeful that the visa process will move forward and that travel to Tehran will be possible for Rusty Schweickart and Bruce McCandless in late October. The group will be hosted in Tehran by the Zirakzadeh Science Foundation (ZSF), where they will meet with their Iranian colleagues in the fields of astronomy, science and technology, and give lectures at Iranian universities and institutions including Sharif University of Technology, Zanjan University, Isfahan Municipality, Isfahan University, Adib Astronomy Society, Kish University, and MAGFA Information Technology Development Center.

Environment

Janet Larsen, an environmentalist with Earth Policy Institute (EPI), traveled to Iran under SFCG auspices and participated in an international environmental conference in Tehran. The conference, organized jointly by Iran and the United Nations Environment Programme, addressed "Environment, Peace and Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures". Janet will send us a report of her travels, which will be posted on the website shortly.

SFCG US-Iran Program Website

http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/iran/programmes_iran.html

For information about US-Iran cultural programs, exhibits, and other Track II activities being organized by different institutions across the country, please visit the *Links and Resources* page of the US-Iran Program website at http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/iran/iran_links.html

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