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100 Iranians Tried for Disputing Election

Prosecutor Says U.S. Abetted Them

By Thomas Erdbrink
Washington Post Foreign Service
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TEHRAN, Aug. 1 -- More than 100 political activists and protesters went on trial Saturday on charges of rioting and conspiring to topple the government in the turmoil surrounding [Iran's](#) presidential election, the semiofficial Fars news agency reported.

The defendants included several prominent politicians -- former members of parliament, first-generation revolutionaries and an ex-vice president -- who have been locked in a decades-long power struggle with Iran's hard-line clerics and Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Wearing gray prison uniforms and appearing thin after weeks in jail, some defendants gave lengthy confessions, saying President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the disputed June 12 election free of fraud.

Only state media were allowed to attend the closed trial, which took place days before the date of Ahmadinejad's second inauguration.

Supporters of the accused denied the allegations and said the confessions were given under pressure.

"Those who organized this trial should be tried," said Emad Afroogh, a former supporter of Ahmadinejad, according to the Fararoo.ir news Web site.

The detailed allegations against the politicians, most of whom support the defeated presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, are the beginning of an attempt to purge the political system, analysts say. If the dissidents are convicted, their parties could be declared illegal and their backers labeled anti-revolutionaries.

Tehran's deputy prosecutor, Abdolreza Mohabbati, said the allegations centered on a confession by a "spy for the Central Intelligence Agency who had recently returned to execute the plan for unrest."

The unnamed spy accused the pro-Mousavi politicians of executing a yearlong plot to bring about a velvet revolution, according to the indictment, which was published in full by Fars news. Iranian leaders have warned for years against any attempt at a foreign-backed popular movement similar to those that ousted governments in Eastern Europe, most recently in Georgia and Ukraine.

Mohabbati accused the United States and other countries of masterminding the effort. He alleged that several U.S. organizations, including the Soros Institute, Freedom House and Stanford University, financed and instructed pro-Mousavi politicians in order to bring down the country's leadership.

To support his case, Mohabbati cited confessions obtained from the detainees, who have been in jail for weeks without contact with lawyers. He constructed a narrative in which dozens of incidents, including meetings with British agents, were linked to plans for a velvet revolution.

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In the days leading up to the election, it became clear that the Ahmadinejad and Mousavi camps would not accept a losing outcome.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards, widely seen as strongly opposing Mousavi, warned in the days leading up to the election that his supporters were planning a velvet revolution.

Aides to Mousavi and another presidential candidate, Mehdi Karroubi, warned of fraud and created a "committee to protect the votes" weeks before the election.

The defendants on Saturday included two photographers, Majid Saeedi of U.S.-based Getty Images and Satyar Emami of the French photo agency Sipa. They were accused of working without permits during the clashes.

"They would visualize a crisis-ridden and agitated country," the prosecutor said. "Viewers would think that these hooligans were Iranian people protesting the outcome of the elections."

Newsweek correspondent Maziar Bahari, who was arrested on June 21, also appeared in court Saturday. At a news conference later in the day, he expressed regret for his actions.

"On behalf of myself and my press colleagues, I apologize to Iran's great nation and supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution for doing harm to the country," he said.

Several groups were accused of direct involvement in the riots that followed the election. The main culprits, the prosecutor said, were members of Mujaheddin-e Khalq, an armed Iranian opposition group based in [Iraq](#). Mohabbati said others were linked to the United States and [Israel](#).

The U.S. Congress approved a budget of \$400 million during the Bush administration aimed at assisting Iranian opposition groups, The Washington Post reported in 2008.

After the indictment was read, former vice president Mohammad-Ali Abtahi, a vocal opponent of Ahmadinejad, offered his confession, saying, "the issue of fraud in Iran was a lie."

Another defendant, Mohammad Atrianfar, a senior member of a party close to former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, also confessed, saying the election had been fair.

When a government journalist asked him about his sudden "change of heart," Atrianfar was cryptic. "It is only God who can change one's heart," he said. "When one is put in a situation in which one might not be alive the next day, then one can experience an evolution."

Special correspondent Kay Armin Serjoie contributed to this report.

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